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["I AM SORRY YOU ARE VEXED ABOUT IT, DARLING!" SAID SYBIL, IN HER SOFT, TENDER WAY.]

KIT.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONSTANCE MARLOWE sat staring at the letter on her knee. Each cold, profoundly contemptuous word stung her as though they were so many sharp-edged weapons.

She was not sensitive by nature; she had been, and was, capable of doing many mean unwomanly acts without any aftermath of conscientious scruples or remorse. Prevarications, tricks, deceits were as nothing to her, had she some object to attain.

But she was a true disciple of the modern-day philosophy, and there was nothing more terrible or more annoying to her than the possibility of being "found out" in any one of the small dishonours she was capable of performing.

And this was just what had happened. After all her scheming, after all her cleverness, in the very zenith of what had seemed to her approaching success, that which she had feared in the beginning had come to pass, and come to pass in an even worse manner than she had dreamed of then. Philip Desmond wrote very clearly and to the point.

He did not address her. The letter began abruptly,—

"I am writing to inform you of the fact that I have this day asked your cousin, Katherine, to become my wife, and that she has given me the greatest happiness I can know in consenting to do so. Perhaps, after this statement, you will not be wholly unprepared for what I have to say next, which is briefly that the true story of your cousin's career since she left your mother's house is now known to me. I am at a loss to comprehend what reason can have induced you to have given me so false an account of the matter.

"Many times of late the incongruity and absurdity of the story you related have forced themselves upon me, more especially as the beauty and nobility of Katherine's nature has been revealed to me; and had it not been for my promise to you, I should have spoken to her more than once on the subject; my lips, however, were sealed until to-night, when, as she has become from now henceforth the dearest object of my life, I felt it no disloyalty to you (since you had begged for my absolute silence, simply to gratify her whim) to question her on the matter.

"The child's simple record of all that has passed has given me the greatest pleasure and the deepest pain. Pleasure in that I have found undoubted proof for my faith in her noble nature; and pain that I am compelled to recognise not only deceit, but downright dishonour, in a character which up to now has won my most sincere admiration and sympathy.

"I have sat thinking very quietly over all you said, and the more I think, the more puzzled I am to account for your action.

"One truth, however, has forced itself upon me, and that is that though you are her kinswoman, and should therefore have naturally some affection for her, you are no true friend to Katherine, and are better out of her life. For all the loyalty and love she gives you, you answer with a wrong. She calls you her benefactress, speaks of you gently and tenderly

as having helped her when she needed help. "She would never have opened her lips about you or about herself, but, as my betrothed wife, she has recognised my right to question and be answered. I have told her nothing. The clever fabrication with which you imposed on me shall remain our secret.

"I can see well that Katherine is troubled about you, but I will ask no more questions; if she were to know of your unaccountable action, it would be to give her grief and deep regret. It is my desire to shield her from all sorrow, and to guard her pure young heart fresh and sweet as long as my life shall last. And so, remembering your falsehood, and knowing the danger that an unprincipled nature can do to a simpler and a better one, I regret I have no other alternative than to tell you, plainly and straightforwardly, that all connection must cease at once between my future wife and yourself.

"Outwardly, of course, you will seem to be friends, the world must be considered, but more than this shall never be. I am writing by this post to your mother, to acquaint her with my engagement to her niece, and to inform her of our almost immediate marriage.

"In conclusion, let me advise you to restrain your fictional tendencies in discussing your friends and acquaintances, and remember that from now everything that concerns Katherine is my affair, and will be dealt with by me accordingly. An insult to her will be avenged by me. You have hitherto known me only as a friend and a man of peace—it lies in your own hands to maintain this latter order.—Faithfully yours,

"Philip Desmond."

She had read the words over and over again. When her eyes had first fallen on his handwriting, a great excitement and delight had filled her: she had rushed upstairs to her own room with her treasure. The letter had reached Hutstead Manor by a late post, and had arrived when Constance had been engaged in a semi-flirtation with a young man who had fallen very much in love with her and worshipped her beauty. Constance's vanity could not fail to be gratified by this devotion, but her thoughts were very busy, and she did nothing but conjecture and conjecture over Philip and his sudden departure, till her head ached. The advent of the letter-bag only slightly aroused her, until she suddenly caught sight of Desmond's well-known handwriting. With flushed cheeks and a beating heart she ran up the stairs two at a time, and locked herself into her room.

"He has written! It must be a proposal at last—at last!" was her dazed, exultant thought, and she held the letter unopened for a time in her excitement. When at last she unfolded the paper, she was absolutely convinced that her scheming was all ended and that the goal was won.

As she read the first lines every drop of blood seemed to rush from her heart to her head; she staggered, and had to clutch the bed-post to prevent herself from falling.

She dragged herself to a chair, and sat in it while she read the letter through quietly, deliberately. Those who were envious of Constance Marlowe, and her universally admired beauty, must have given her sudden pity if her face could have been revealed to them in this moment. It was old and lined all at once. A grey pallor spread over her rose-tinted cheeks—her lips were set and white. For the first time in her life she suffered acutely—absolutely. She shrank from herself in this moment.

So powerful was the condemnation and contempt conveyed in this letter, that she seemed to be hideous in her own sight.

Her wrong, her falseness, rose clear before her. She almost acknowledged the justice of her punishment.

But nature is a strong element. At the first horrible fear and agony passed, Constance became herself again—herself, only more bitter, more cruel, more hard. Thoughts that were terrible in their revengeful import crowded her mind.

She was a very murderess in will. She sat, she knew not for how long, her arms folded across her breast, her hands cold as death.

The letter fluttered and lay at her feet, and the sound of the laughing voices from outside floated in to mock at her misery. She cursed them under her breath, and then she awoke to real facts. She must go out among them all, and laugh and act as though nothing had happened.

She rose to her feet, and went to her glass very deliberately, she looked at herself; the colour was coming back into her cheeks, she smiled at her reflection. There was no change. The dent of the blow was buried in her heart, it was her secret alone.

She picked up the letter, unlocked her door, and went, as we have seen, to Lady Sinclair's room.

She was enduring mortification and disappointment almost too great to describe, but she showed none of it.

She deceived Lady Sinclair, greatly to that kind-hearted little woman's comfort, and she would have deceived everybody. She was a skilled actress.

When she regained her own room, she sat down and stared at the letter. There was nothing definite in her head, nothing certain in her mind, except the eager, overwhelming desire—the desire for revenge.

"It will come; I can wait," she said, between her teeth. "I will make him suffer. Oh! Heaven, I will make him suffer! I will torture him till he shall pray for death, and yet he shall not die!"

She was a mad woman in her rage and revengeful hate. The thought of Kit's unconscious triumph over her made her blood rise to a fury.

The statement of his love, of his devotion to this girl whom she allowed herself to patronise and despise alternately, was almost more than she could bear at the moment. She had to rise and walk to and fro to give vent to the feverish excitement in her frame; she did not know herself in this mood, she was transformed.

When Lady Sinclair knocked at the door a little while later, however, and popped in her head, she found Constance at her writing-table, pen in hand.

"Will you ever forgive me, Lena?" cried Miss Marlowe, looking round, and laughing a little. "I don't think I shall drive, after all. I have a heap of letters to answer; mamma expects a daily epistle, as you know, and now I must send my congratulations. Have you written?"

Lady Sinclair said "no." She was pulling on her driving-gloves, and was apparently engrossed in the task, but her eyes were full of tender sympathy for her friend and her friend's bravery.

"She does feel it after all, poor girl!" she thought to herself. "How plucky she is; I should be just mad!"

Out loud, she said,—

"Oh! there is plenty of time. I am a bad correspondent, as Philip knows, and, besides,"—she paused a moment—"besides, I am not quite sure whether I shall send any congratulations; I don't feel congratulatory, and I never could be a hypocrite. The whole thing has amazed me beyond words, and I only hope Philip won't regret making a fool of himself at his time of life, that is all!"

Constance laughed softly.

"Dear Lena, you are such a dear, funny creature! Why, Sir Philip is quite a young man comparatively speaking."

"Not when the 'comparatively speaking' means marriage with a stupid child of a school-girl. Why, that chit can't be more than sixteen, is she?"

"Age makes very little difference when a man is in love, Lena."

Lady Sinclair was impatiently angry.

"In love! It is too silly. How can Philip be in love with a red-haired school-girl? Oh! it's all rubbish!"

Constance sighed a short sharp sigh. She had set herself a part to play, but it was not an easy one.

"Poor Sir Philip!" she said, and her voice sounded weary. "I hope you will not let yourself say all this to him, Lena? I am afraid he will not like it."

"I daresay not. Fools never do care to be told of their folly," Lady Sinclair answered, drily; and then her wrath, engendered chiefly on Constance's account, and a good deal on her own in having failed to arrange things as she desired, broke out, "It's all absurd! Philip! Philip Desmond! one of the most celebrated men of the day, so brilliant, so clever, so great, to go and throw himself away on a bit of a scrubby girl with red hair! Please forgive me, Constance. I know she is your cousin, but I can't help myself. I am furious. Of course I wanted Philip to marry, but not marry like this. I wanted him to have a wife who would be an ornament and an honour to him, and now——"

Constance was tapping the desk with her pen. Her friend's anger and loyalty was a great salve to her smarting vanity, still it irritated her. She much preferred to be alone, at least just for the moment.

"Dear Lena," she said, softly, and with a weary sigh, "don't fret so much. After all, you will do no good, and you can't alter things. They——"

"Can't I?" inquired Lady Sinclair, defiantly. "Well, I don't know. I can write and give Philip the truth of my mind at all events, and that will be something. I can point out to him the hideous mistake he is making. I can——"

Constance rose hurriedly.

"No, no," she said, eagerly, imperatively. "Lena, this is impossible. You can do nothing, you must do nothing. Sir Philip is his own master, and must be the best judge of his own affairs. If regret follows, he has only himself to thank. For myself, I do not see why regret should come, but that is for the future. Why should you interfere, why should you quarrel with one of your oldest and best friends? I entreat you to let the matter rest, accept the inevitable. It is wonderful how easily one can do these disagreeable things when one tries."

Lady Sinclair said nothing. She looked at the face before her. Constance wore her usual serene expression, only a little sorrowful and very weary. There was an air of patient submission that went straight to Lady Sinclair's impulsive tender heart.

"You are an angel, Constie!" she said, bending forward to kiss the beautiful face, and then as she was running away she looked back. "And I shall hate her—the little red-haired cat!" she cried, and then she vanished.

Constance laughed a hollow sort of laugh as she was alone.

Lena can hate well, and she is powerful. Philip Desmond's wife may have good reason to find that truth an unpleasant one. He may guard her as much as he likes, he may wrap her purity and nobility about with cotton wool; he is not omnipotent, and my time will come. It may not be to-day or to-morrow, but it will come all the same. I can wait and I can work. I do not care if I wait till I am old and grey, if I can only see him suffer in the end—see him suffer through her!"

She sat down to her writing again, and took up her pen. Her eyes fell vaguely on a diamond bangle she wore, it had been the bridegroom's present to the bridesmaids.

"If I can see her kicked into the gutter, and thrust the sword of my revenge into his heart!"

So ran the venom of her thoughts, and, as she sat, there came, she knew not how or why, suddenly into her mind a remembrance of Maurice Montgomery's strange words and sullen set face.

She did not know why this should be, it had

no coherence with her other thoughts; but the memory came clear enough, and it seemed to twine itself in with her anger and her hatred and her revengeful desire, till it became part and parcel of the whole.

Afterwards the mist in her mind cleared away on this point, and she understood the meaning of the confused intermingling of Maurice Montgomery with her plans for the future and her revenge.

CHAPTER XXII.

Almost before the world of Philip Desmond's friends and acquaintances had grasped the first astonishing fact of his engagement came the news that his marriage was already accomplished.

Within three weeks of Sybil Montgomery's marriage Kit had been transferred from her lowly state to one which placed her on a pinnacle of social grandeur and regard, and her feet were set on the beginning of a path that seemed to her glorious in the promise of perpetual sunshine, heavenly in its atmosphere of constant tender love and protection.

Philip Desmond had always been an enigma and a mystery to society by reason of his frequent and long isolations in foreign lands, and by his seeming devotion to bachelordom. His marriage was a source of excitement and gossip.

Had it occurred in the middle or end of the London season, the gossip would have been tremendous; but even as it was, no country house, no shooting-box, or yachting party but embraced the news at first with incredulity, then amazement, and altogether with enjoyment.

Everyone liked Philip Desmond, although some feared him; but with nearly everyone the distinguished soldier was a prime favourite, and speculation was rife on the subject of the young wife he had chosen.

At first there was a confusion of ideas by reason of Kit's surname being the same as Constance's; but in the announcement of the marriage briefly put in the *Morning Post*, it was very soon seen that the fair Constance was not the heroine of the moment.

Everyone was eager to get all the information possible about the wedding; but there was no one to inform them except Lady Milborough or Mrs. Marlowe, who appeared to have been the only two people at the ceremony.

There was no mention of bridesmaids or finery, the announcement merely stating that Katherine Mary, only daughter of the late George Marlowe, Esq., had been married by special license to Sir Philip Desmond, Bart., at the Chapel Royal Savoy, and that the newly-married couple had gone to Ireland for the honeymoon.

Everything had been done quietly and quickly. Philip neglected nothing that was necessary to his young wife's dignity; but he was determined to avoid all fuss and as much publicity as possible.

He travelled down to the Limes himself, and coldly but courteously expressed his desire that Mrs. Marlowe should be present at the marriage ceremony, and go through the form of giving her niece away.

His visit coming soon after his letter, left Mrs. Marlowe with nothing to say apart from the very sincere qualms of conscience that she had suffered about Kit, and, to do Mrs. Marlowe justice, she was sincere, and had a conscience. Her narrow vulgar mind was considerably impressed by the astounding fact that Kit was about to become so great a person. Titles were one of the few worldly things that found a resting-place in Mrs. Marlowe's heart, she had a weakness for them, and she valued them very highly.

She agreed at once to all Sir Philip proposed, and she won his unwilling respect by her cold demeanour towards Kit.

"At least she is not a hypocrite," he said to himself; "she does not like my darling, but she does not pretend to do so, which is honest if it is disagreeable."

An invitation, gently worded by Kit, had been written to Constance; but Miss Marlowe had gone conveniently yachting with Lady Sinclair and a party, and so was spared the trouble of answering or attending.

Philip had frowned when his little friend Lena had sent him two lines of curt, formal congratulation. He was hurt with her, and he felt, justly, that it was a poor return for his long and oft-tried friendship; but he kept this to himself, and, in his happiness, managed to forget all annoyance.

Sybil would have rushed to be with Kit on the most important day of her life had it been possible, but no one knew exactly where the bride and bridegroom were wandering; all that could be done was for Philip to write to Captain Montgomery, and Kit to pen a few tender words to Sybil, telling the wonderful news, and asking for her prayers and good wishes.

Kit had been a wife of three days when these letters reached the Montgomerys. They had been on an expedition up some of the Swiss mountains in company with a party of amusing Americans whom they had met *en route*, and with whom Maurice had fraternised warmly and quickly. Sybil, with natural shyness and reserve, did not respond so easily to the friendly overtures of these strangers as her husband, and deep in her heart there came a little pain, when she saw how delighted Maurice was to quit their *solitude à deux* for the merry laughter and bustle of a party.

She made excuses for him, of course—did she not love him utterly, absolutely?—but the pain did not go because of the excuses, and she grew a little more shy and reserved in consequence. It was nothing to Maurice whether his wife liked what he liked or did otherwise. He was tired of her company, and he preferred rather to be amused by others than to find some satisfaction for his *ennui* and bad temper in quarrelling with her. He sighed impatiently at Sybil's devotion; she would be a terrible nuisance, he said to himself, if she meant to continue as she had begun. Yet, though he was bored, he could not help feeling a certain sense of pleasure in having this girl so deeply infatuated with him; it pleased his all-powerful vanity, and anything that did that could not fail to be agreeable to him. The meeting with the Americans was a decided bit of good luck to Maurice, and he very soon managed to make the most of it. In a grudging sort of way he gave his little wife some admiration that was sincere. She was always well, never grew tired, always good-tempered; her sunny nature shone about him in a way that should have made a better man of him.

But though he recognised all this, Maurice did not fail to be aggrieved over Sybil's other attributes.

She was not pretty, nor, compared with the American women, was she even smart; her charms lay in her nature and in a sweet expression on her gentle, comely face. Her clear, healthy complexion was her greatest beauty; but Maurice had a picture in his mind of a pale delicate skin set in an aureola of copper-red hair, and Sybil's colouring seemed almost vulgar when he compared her with Kit.

Although she had been pained at his evident eagerness to join the other party, Sybil could not complain that Maurice neglected her.

In fact, his temper, which had not been very pleasant before, distinctly improved, and he was so gay, so handsome, so happy, that Sybil rejoiced and was happy too.

She had many lessons to learn in the hard task of mastering the many gradations of a man's most vital part, his selfishness; she would not be long, however, in grasping the rudiments of some, for Maurice was an apt tutor.

The excursion up the mountains lasted many days. They had given no orders for their letters to be sent after them—in fact, this would have been almost an impossibility—so that when they reached the hotel from which they had started Sybil found a perfect budget of correspondence awaiting them.

Woman-like, she rushed to the letters as to so many dear friends, and Maurice smiled with amusement at her eagerness. On the whole he was pleased with Sybil. He had indulged in a very good flirtation with one of the prettiest of the Americans during the excursion, and little Mrs. Montgomery had betrayed neither cognisance of nor annoyance at the fact, thereby considerably enhancing her value in her husband's eyes, and in the eyes of the rest of the party.

Maurice would have been tremendously astonished if he could have known the admiration his late *compagnons de voyage* bestowed on Sybil, and the semi-contemptuous regard they had for his handsome self. This was the sort of thing he would not have understood. He sauntered into the *salle* to read his letters.

Sybil, with tears in her eyes (tears seemed to lie just behind her eyes now, though why she could not tell), seized on her home letters.

No one had forgotten her. There was a letter from everybody. Her married sisters, her mother, her father, some of the pensioners, a dozen well-liked friends, a few of the servants, and one in Kit's quaint unusual hand.

She hastily opened her home correspondence first—it was like a breath of Hulstead to receive them, and she felt that the old air was somehow more sweet and dear than any other, and then she opened Kit's.

At the first words she gasped; then she flew, in a wild state of excitement, to find her husband.

"Maurice! Maurice!" she cried, "where are you? I want you! What do you think has happened? What——"

Maurice was not in the *salle*.

She was dreadfully disappointed. She ran about seeking him everywhere, like a child. She must find him, there was such news to tell him—such astounding news—something so extraordinary, something so wonderful and yet so delightful.

Maurice was outside in the gardens; he heard her coming, and he put the best curb possible on the fury of rage and passionate jealousy that had overwhelmed him. He was glad of the dusk to hide his face.

Sybil rushed upon him in a whirlwind.

"Oh, here you are, darling! I have been looking for you everywhere, everywhere. I have got such news, such——"

"So have I!" Maurice laughed a short laugh. "I suppose it is the same, Desmond has written to me!"

"And I have heard from Kate. I assure you, Maurice, I am so amazed I hardly know whether I am on my head or my heels. Philip going to marry my little Kit! It is too wonderful! What is to-day—the 7th September? Why, they are married already—oh! If I had only known—if only I could have sent her one word of congratulation."

Maurice's evil temper arose, he was not skilled in self-restraint.

"Congratulations," he sneered, "to whom? To Philip for marrying a housemaid, or to her for tying herself up with an old man for life?"

Sybil shrank back from him, his voice was so bitter; she was silent, and the pleasure she had felt died out all at once.

Maurice went on talking angrily, sneeringly. There was a sound in his voice she had never heard before.

"Congratulations, indeed! Philip is a fool to marry at his age, and to marry a woman utterly beneath him in station and——"

Sybil broke in hurriedly.

"Oh, no, dear. I am sure you are wrong. I don't know for certain, of course, but I am sure—yes, I am sure Kate is not what you say. She is a lady in every thought and deed, a——"

Maurice shrank at the mere mention of Kit's name.

"A lady masquerading as a servant! It is a funny mix up altogether, deceit and Heaven knows what!" He spoke very thickly, laughing that short, hard laugh again. "Anyhow, I think it is a very regrettable business, and I don't think Philip has treated me fairly."

To himself, under his breath, he muttered—

"D——n him! d——n him! She is mine, she belongs to me; she loves me, she loves me, and he has taken her. D——n him!"

He was almost impotent in his rage.

Sybil was silent a moment, and then said, very gently,—

"Why do you say that, dear? How has Sir Philip treated you unfairly?

"Oh! because he should have remembered me. He has no right to go and get married now at this time of his life, when all along I have been supposed to be his heir, and——"

Sybil was silent. This selfish, ungenerous speech hurt her to the quick. She knew how fond Philip had always been of Maurice, and how much he had done for the young man.

It was incomprehensible to her that anyone should or could have such mercenary, selfish thoughts. She felt she would rather Maurice had struck her a blow than have betrayed his real nature to her as he had done in this speech. But she loved him, and the power of that love was great enough to find an excuse even for such a fault as this.

"I am sorry you are vexed about it, darling," she said, in her soft, tender way; "but," she hesitated, then gained courage, "but you—you do not need Sir Philip now you have me, and——"

Maurice swung himself from her impatiently, angrily.

"You think I am fretting over the money," he said, with an inconsistency that Sybil happily attributed to his vexation. "Money! there is more than mere money in the matter. It is a miserable thing—horrible! horrible!"

He strode away saying this, and Sybil gathered her letters together, and went indoors slowly.

She was conscious of a dull, dead ache in her heart. It was early days for such a pain to have a place there, but it was there all the same, and, as she went upstairs wearily to her room, the tears that had lain behind her eyes found a vent and rolled down her cheeks.

The shadow Kit had prayed so earnestly might be averted from this gentle creature's path, was creeping slowly but surely upon her. In a little while it would have spread over the whole of her young life's sky, and darkened the glory of her love.

* * * * *

And while the shadow was drawing near to Sybil Montgomery's heart, the knowledge and reality of true, pure happiness was slowly making its way into Kit's life. She had never known what the word happiness meant till now. Her heart was laden with gratitude, with love for this man who was so good, so great in his tenderness and devotion.

The story of a woman's love was slowly being revealed to her. Too childish trust, the gratitude she gave Philip Desmond were there still; but something more was growing, a deeper, a more intense feeling, a longing to repay in some small measure the debt of his goodness to her.

It was impossible for her to be with such a nature as Philip Desmond possessed without gauging its beauties to their uttermost depths.

As though brought by invisible fairy fingers, her old illusions crept back into her heart. Her dreams floated once more in her mind. Life, the world, became again what they had been to her in the days when she had sat under the gooseberry bushes and ran races with Chris across the meadows.

The same yet even better, for now she had that which before had always been lacking—a heart that was absolutely hers, a strong, tender hand to cling to, a love so great that tears of gratitude and joy would rise to her eyes as she realised it.

"If I could only tell you really, really, really how much you have given me!" she said, one day, to him as they stood in the grounds of the old Irish house that had been Kit's first home in her new life.

Her arm was in his, and he was holding her little hand between his own two strong ones.

"Do you think I do not know, little one?" Philip answered, softly. "But the debt is equal, for you have given me even more than I have given you—my beloved, my cherished wife!"

He kissed her lips, and they turned indoors.

"It is strange the Montgomerys do not write. I thought to have heard from Maurice certainly before now," he said, as they went.

"Perhaps they have not had our letters yet?" Kit answered.

A slight cloud passed over her mind as Maurice was mentioned. His memory was the one shadowed spot in her heart. She had learnt to forget his treachery, and to regard him with contempt and horror. Many a time she longed to open up that sealed book, and tell her husband all that had happened, but she hesitated.

First, for Sybil's sake her woman's delicate sympathy forbade that she should let even Philip know the truth of that girl's wasted love; and then she knew that were she to speak of Maurice's infamy, she would give Philip a terrible blow and a great unhappiness.

This she could not endure to do. It was her one prayer that she should minister to him always for his happiness, and so in her simple love she deemed that silence was best.

The past was past and done with. Maurice would not need a word to tell him this. Her lip sneered with contempt as she thought of his probable fear and anxiety lest she should speak.

He would soon understand that her silence was eloquent with all the scorn of a woman who knew him at his true worth; and so long as Sybil was allowed to live in happy ignorance, and Philip's great heart was not distressed by the knowledge of Maurice's falseness, Kit determined her silence should last.

If she had only spoken, what misery she would have been saved! But, poor child, she acted for the best and purest reasons, and the future was veiled from her eyes.

(To be continued.)

HER FATHER'S SECRET.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—*(continued.)*

Their triumphant escape from Oakshaw somewhat lessened the bitterness of their failure to discover the wished-for document, and Lord Tressilian exerted himself to render his companions cheerful. They rode slowly, both horses and riders being fatigued, and conversed freely.

It only required that their errand should have been successful to make their morning-ride delightful. The sun arose warm and pleasant, turning the dew drops on trees and hedges into magnificent diamonds; the morning breeze drew the sweetest fragrance from the lovely flowers, and to the jaded senses of the travellers it proved refreshing; the birds indulged in a perfect carnival of melody, and even the hawthorn hedges and the grass by the roadside had an unusually clear, emerald-like look.

"There is no use in hurrying our return to Edencourt," said the Viscount as they slowly proceeded along a green country-lane. "Sir Allyn is aware that you are gone on this errand, Ilde, and will not expect your return until evening. Their well will soon be informed of our adventure, and haste on our part will not improve matters. I think we had better alight at West Hoxton to rest ourselves and wait until afternoon before finishing our journey."

Ilde acquiesced in this decision, as also did her friend, and it was decided that they should stay at the place designated.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when they came in sight of the straggling village and railway-station of West Hoxton. It was a pretty place, on the bank of the river and sheltered by a profusion of trees, the shade of which looked inexpressibly refreshing to the weary riders.

Upon the very outskirt of the village, close to the roadside, and flanked by tea-gardens, was a small, neat-looking inn, with a long-covered verandah in front, and a projecting sign bearing the name of the establishment—the *Pig and Whistle*. At the door of this inn the travellers alighted and were conducted into a cool, sanded parlour, while the groom disappeared with the horses in the direction of the stable.

The first requisite of the young ladies was an hour or so of rest, the second was dinner. A room was therefore ordered for them without delay, and they were conducted to it almost immediately. It was a pleasant double bedded deparnment, with sanded floor, and looked towards the west. Here a cup of tea was brought to each, and they then sought refreshment in slumber.

It was afternoon when they awakened, and exactly one o'clock when they presented themselves in the parlour with bright, smiling faces, and renovated toilets. Lord Tressilian was waiting there to receive them, and came forward, giving a hand to each.

"Dinner will be served immediately," he said. "Let us try to forget our troubles, Ilde, and enjoy our pic-nic repast here. Although we have failed in our endeavours to discover that important paper, we need not despair. Nearly a month's respite remains to us, and it will be hard indeed if in a month we cannot do something."

Ilde replied cheerfully, and Kate Arsdale, who but half comprehended her friend's cause for grief, became merry and gay.

The dinner was brought in and proved very tempting, with its plump, freshly caught trout, its nicely browned chicken, and profusion of delicacies. The trio, striving to forget all that was unpleasant in their situation, enjoyed the unceremonious repast, and were only sorry when it was concluded.

The dinner over and the day proving warm, two or three hours were suffered to relapse before starting for home. The sun was declining in the west when the horses were brought around and the party again set out upon their journey.

As on the previous night, Ilde looked long and earnestly at the pretty cottage-ornée of Monrepos when they came near it, and was tempted to dismount and call upon Miss Wilmer. Promising herself that pleasure soon, but remarking that there was a singular air of confusion and bustle about the place, she rode on, little dreaming of the change that had taken place in the home of the Wilmers during the past few hours.

The remainder of the journey was quickly performed.

At the distance of a few miles from Edenville the travellers encountered two riders, one of whom proved to be Therwell. The other was his servant who had summoned him to Oakshaw.

The former reined in his horse as he recognised the little party, and an angry scowl passed over his face, quickly disappearing, however, and giving place to a bland expression. He looked at each member of the group with a keen, scrutinising glance, remarking their general air of disappointment, then bowed politely, and said, with a smile,—

"Miss Dare has been to look at her future home, I suppose. I hope she was pleased with it!"

There was no response, but Ilde involuntarily slackened the speed of her horse.

A strange expression shone forth from the blue eyes of Therwell. A singularly unpleasant smile lingered upon his lips, and his voice was soft and smooth as he said,—

"I understand you thoroughly, Miss Dare. I know why you went to Oakshaw. I half expected you would go. But I could have told you beforehand that you would not find what you sought there."

"Well?" said Ilde half haughtily, raising the reins as if about to pass on.

"Is it war between us, Miss Dare?" he asked, in a hissing tone.

She bowed coldly.

"So be it then!" she responded, his cold blue eyes gleaming. "But you cannot avert your fate. You may struggle if you will, but you will only tighten your bonds!"

Ilde responded only by a defiant look—a look in which her whole soul expressed bitter repugnance to him. He comprehended it, bit his lip, and then whispered,—

"Remember, Miss Dare, that I am not to be goaded too far. I will not bear a great deal. Shall I remind you that your father's life is at stake?"

Ilde grew pale and shuddered; then dashed on at a furious pace as if anxious to escape from him. Kate Arsdale and Lord Tressilian followed her. Therwell looked after them, gave a few words of direction to his servant, and then galloped in pursuit of his promised bride. She did not permit him to overtake her, but dashed through the lower park gate, which she closed in his face, and then rode more slowly towards home. At the lake she parted with Lord Tressilian, who clasped her hand with a lover's tenderness, and begged her still to cherish hope.

"It will go hard if I cannot defeat that man," said the young viscount, earnestly. "Wait and hope, my darling!"

But there was little encouragement in the tones with which he bade her hope. Ilde, however, had her own plans, some of which yet remained to be acted upon; musing upon them, and not at all despairing, she hastened on towards her home and to her father's presence. At the threshold of the mansion she met Therwell face to face, and as she looked up at him defiantly he smiled upon her with a look of conscious power, and again whispered,—

"Remember, Ilde Dare—a life is at stake! Be careful not to imperil it!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

Equal their flame, unequal was their care;
One lov'd with hope, one languished with despair.
Dryden.

On reaching her home Ilde separated from her friend and hastened to her own room, to prepare herself for her interview with her father. She hastened to divest herself of her riding attire, refreshed her weakened energies by a bath, and then dressed herself with exquisite neatness and care. A rose-coloured robe gave to her cheeks something of the colour they had lost, and she entwined among her loose curls a trailing, odorous vine-spray, whose green leaves and tiny scarlet blossoms contrasted well with the golden brown of her hair. Her toilet completed, she went to her father's room.

He was lying upon a couch drawn up before a window, and his wide-open eyes were fixed upon the shifting clouds with an intensely wistful expression. He was not aroused by the quiet entrance of his daughter, and she softly approached his side and looked anxiously upon him for a moment before betraying her presence.

It seemed to her that he had grown thinner and paler during the past few hours. There was a wan look about his mild face which she had never noticed before. His eyes looked heavy, and were underlined by a purple crescent that told of tears and sleeplessness. His mouth, about which even the devoted daughter recognised an expression indicating weakness of will and indecision of character, was drawn into heavy lines at the corners, and told plainly of a weary and grief-worn soul. A look of hair that fell carelessly over his thin forehead was almost as white as snow. His attitude was in keeping with his appearance, and indicated an almost utter hopelessness.

"Father!" whispered the girl, softly, her brown eyes brimming over with tears, and her slender figure drooping painfully at the sad picture before her. "Father!"

That sweet sad voice, low as were its tones, seemed to blend with his thoughts. His lip quivered, and his eyes assumed a thoughtful look, as if he were endeavouring to pierce the veil that concealed from him the future. But he did not turn his head.

"Father!" again said Ilde, and this time her voice took a pleading tone, through which ran an undercurrent of anguish. "Dear father, I am come!"

He heard her now. His wan, thin face lighted up with sudden joy, his lips quivered, his hands worked nervously, and he looked at her with wildly questioning eyes.

"Thank heaven, you have come, my darling!" he cried, making an effort to rise from his reclining position. "I did not expect you so soon. Have—have you good news for me?"

She gently placed him back upon his pillow, and smiled reassuringly, as she knelt beside his couch and bent over and kissed him.

"I did not find the paper, papa," she said, uttering the worst at once, "but I have discovered that it is probably not at Oakshaw."

"Not at Oakshaw?" he faltered.

"No, but you must not despair. It is true that everything looks dark around us now, papa, but you know the old adage—it's always darkest before the dawn. I have but little grounds for it, it is true, but I feel a conviction nevertheless that we, and not Therwell, shall triumph!"

She forced herself to speak with a cheerfulness she was far from feeling. He looked at her earnestly and anxiously, but she met his gaze brightly, smiling at him and looking, as seemed to him, the incarnation of hope and encouragement.

"Blessed little comforter!" he murmured, clinging to her hand as if he depended upon it for safety. "Oh, Ilde, I hope and pray that your conviction may be founded upon truth. What has happened to encourage you?"

This was a question not easily to be answered.

"Perhaps I had better relate my adventure, papa," she answered, smiling, "and you can then judge for yourself whether I have cause for hopefulness."

She drew some cushions beside the couch, seated herself upon them, and then, holding his hand, and keeping her clear dark eyes fixed upon his, began her story. She told first how she had enlisted her favourite groom into her service, and how she appointed to meet him upon the previous night, in company with Miss Arsdale.

"So Kate and I stole down through the gardens, papa, until we came to the laburnum bower. To our astonishment, Mrs. Amry started up out of the thicket——"

"Mrs. Amry?"

Ilde replied to this exclamation by briefly narrating her acquaintance with the new seamstress, and then returned to the original subject. She related how Mrs. Amry had cautioned her to silence and had then drawn her and Miss Arsdale into the thicket, where they had crouched beside her.

"I should have thought her crazy," said the baronet.

"Not so, papa. She was listening to two men, who were holding a secret interview. I recognized the voices immediately as belonging to Therwell and Hoadley. They were talking of our affairs, and Hoadley said that Therwell must pay him more when he came into possession of Edencourt, else he might be tempted to betray him. Enough was said to prove clearly that they were engaged in a conspiracy of which Therwell is the master-spirit."

Sir Allyn uttered a joyful exclamation.

"There were three listeners," he said. "The evidence of the three may help us materially."

"They said nothing, papa, that could clear you of any charge they may wish to make," replied Ilde, gently. "Their words would be counteracted by that paper which Therwell can show. But if that document were destroyed, these proofs of a conspiracy might assist us."

"And you failed to find the paper?" groaned the baronet.

"Yes, father, but I think we have some clue to its whereabouts."

She proceeded to narrate the injunction of Mrs. Amry with regard to the mahogany box, and to detail her discovery that the new seamstress was not unacquainted with Therwell. She then told of her journey, of her meeting with Lord Tressilian, of the night ride, of the arrival at Oakshaw, the search, the letters she had discovered, the imprisonment and the escape.

"A singular adventure, my darling," said the baronet, "and one that I would have spared you even at the cost of much pain to myself. I cannot bear to think that a delicate girl like you should have undergone so much fatigue and danger."

"But think of the alternative, papa," said Ilde. "One night's peril is nothing to be compared to a life-time of bitter suffering."

A deep shadow flitted over her father's face and eyes.

"Oh, if I had only been more brave, more decided!" he moaned. "I might have averted all these sorrows from you, Ilde, if I had been less weak, less fearful of the adverse censures of the world!"

"Do not reproach yourself, dear papa," was the gentle response, while his daughter's manner was ineffably tender and soothing. "It will all be well. You must hope and not despair. I was about to tell you that the letters I discovered were all signed 'M. G.,' and bore reference to some important charge, for which the writer was paid. One of the letters was signed 'Your sister, M. G.' The writer was evidently Therwell's sister. Do you know any of his relatives, or their names?"

"No, dear. Therwell was never communicative. I fancy he was ashamed of his relatives. At any rate, I know nothing except that he is a widower!"

Ilde was silent and thoughtful for a brief space, and her father watched her changing expression as if he expected to read his doom in her lovely face.

"Papa," she said, at length, "we must try to find out who his sister is and where she lives. I am convinced that the charge to which she so frequently alluded to in her letters is the care of that paper. He has led something of a wandering life, and he would never have carried that compact with him, risking its loss. He must have left it somewhere, and what place can be so probable as the hands of his sister, who is of course devoted to his interests?"

"I don't doubt but that you are right, Ilde; but how are we to discover her residence? Therwell would never tell us."

"Certainly not. We must not betray ourselves by an inquiry. But he will probably write to her during his stay here. If I could see the addresses of his letters! I will order them to be brought before me before posting——"

"He posts them himself," interrupted the baronet. "He posted one to-day. No, Ilde, he is too cunning for us!"

"Straightforwardness sometimes conquers

cunning," said Ilde, quietly. "If you will only be hopeful, papa, I am sure I can do something. "There's that clerk at the post-office whom you sent to school and nearly educated. He would do anything for me, and I shall not hesitate to ask him to write down all the addresses of the letters which Therwell sends. There could be no harm accrue to the clerk through that, if the fact were to be made known. The only thing to fear is that Therwell having written to-day, may not write again!"

"I leave everything in your hands, Ilde," responded her father. "I am too weak and ill to do anything but pray for you success. So Lord Tresillian went with you?"

A bright scarlet colour suffused her cheeks, but her sweet eyes did not droop, and her manner betrayed no sense of embarrassment.

"Yes, he went with us, papa," she answered. We could have done nothing without him!"

Sir Allyn sighed.

"Be careful, darling," he said tenderly. "Do not allow yourself to love poor Gay, and do not encourage the boy to love you. We must not involve another life in the wreck of ours!"

"But, papa," said Ilde, and her glorious magnetic eyes flashed with a strange, sweet radiance, and her countenance glowed with tender resoluteness. "I love Gay now. I shall always love him. I believe I have loved him since our childhood, for my heart was drawn towards him the first moment of our meeting the other day," and her tones grew low as she made the confession. "I tell you this frankly, dear papa, because Gay loves me as he will never love anyone else, and because," here her voice grew fuller and stronger, "I know that I shall yet become his wife!"

"You know it, darling?"

"Yes, father. The great Being who formed Gay and me for each other—who made us so much alike that at our first meeting we felt an electric thrill, the sweetness of mutual love—that all-loving Father would never permit us to be torn apart. He would never doom me to a loveless existence with Therwell, and condemn Gay to a solitary, disappointed life. I cannot help hoping and believing this when I reflect upon the watchful care that extends over even the humblest of human creatures!"

Her tone of fervid faith in the justice and goodness of Providence kindled an answering sentiment in the bosom of her father. His face grew hopeful and eager, as hers flushed with crimson and became confused and downcast, as she laid bare the holiest and most sacred emotions of her soul—those emotions she had scarcely yet dared to acknowledged to herself.

"We will hope then to the last!" said Sir Allyn, laying his hand upon her bowed young head. "Keep up your faith, my darling!"

"I shall work too, papa. To-morrow I shall call upon Miss Wilmer and inquire after Shawcross. Then I shall adopt my plan about Therwell's letters. I will see Headley again, as a last resource. I have some hope that Mrs. Amry may assist me. But you are excited now, father, and look as if you had not slept last night; let me put you to rest, and then I will have an interview with our new seamstress!"

The baronet yielded to Ilde's solicitations, and permitted her to soothe him into the slumbers he so greatly needed. She drew the curtains to shut out the light of the waning day, and with her gentle, caressing hand on his forehead soothed away his pains and cares, thereby inducing a tranquil sleep.

When his breathing testified that he had become lost to consciousness she arose and silently quitted the apartment, hastening to her own. Then she rang her bell, and directed the servant who answered her summons to request Mrs. Amry, the new seamstress, to come to her at once.

A few minutes later the strange woman entered her presence.

She had a very lady-like appearance, in her neat attire of black silk, and with her gray hair smoothly brushed away from her fore-head, and Ilde was impressed, as she had been before, with the conviction that she was one of that unfortunate class who have known "better days."

"Please be seated, Mrs Amry," she said, courteously, pointing to an arm-chair. "I have but lately returned from my expedition from Oakshaw, and have asked for your attendance at the earliest opportunity!"

Mrs. Amry accepted the seat indicated.

"Were you successful, Miss Dare?" she asked quickly.

"No. I found no trace of what I sought, or of the box you described to me."

The woman looked intensely disappointed.

"But I think I have gained a clue to it," said Ilde. 'Perhaps you can enable me to follow up this clue, Mrs. Amry. It is evident to me that you know Therwell, and that you are familiar with some portion at least of his history. I beg you to be frank with me and answer the questions I may ask of you."

The seamstress looked troubled and uneasy. She hesitated, appearing to debate within herself, and replied.—

"Ask what you will, Miss Dare. As far as I can, I will answer your questions. So long as you do not trench upon what I deem it best to keep secret a little longer, I shall not hesitate to speak frankly."

Ilde became grave at the reservation implied in the response, but took a seat near the woman she had befriended, and commenced her task at once.

"It seems to me," she said, "that you may possibly bear some relationship to Therwell. Are you his wife?"

Mrs. Amry smiled and shook her head, touching her gray locks significantly.

"No, Miss Dare, I am not his wife," she answered, her voice full of sternness, strangely at variance with her smile.

"He has been married, I understand," said Ilde, apologetically. "Papa told me that Therwell is a widower. Do not be offended at my rudeness, Mrs. Amry. You do not know in what a critical position I am placed. My father is ill and unable to protect me. Therwell has unfortunately a hold upon Papa, and he claims my hand in marriage as the price of his forbearance. You can hardly imagine with what loathing I look upon this projected union or upon Therwell."

"Yes, I can imagine it," declared the seamstress, with singular emphasis.

"At present I am at the mercy of our enemy," continued the maiden, won by the woman's evident sympathy to confide in her. "If I could only see some way of escape from the bonds he is expecting to put upon me. Can you help me?"

Mrs. Amry was silent.

"Are you his mother or sister?" inquires the baronet's daughter.

"Neither, thank heaven, not one drop of his blood flows in my veins!"

"Do you know anything of his family or relatives? He has a sister. Do you know her name?"

"I know only that he has a sister Maria. She was married, I believe, but I never heard her last name. Therwell always called her Maria. He said once she was very fond of him, but he was not sure if she did not love money better."

"You do not know where his sister lived?" Mrs. Amry replied in the negative.

"I have reason to believe that the paper I seek is in her hands," said Ilde, striving to keep up her courage. "I would give anything to discover her."

"And I am powerless to help you," said Mrs. Amry, regretfully. "Therwell was always very reticent about his own affairs, and he never liked to talk of his family."

"Cannot you help me in any other way?" questioned the maiden. "Do you know of nothing he has done that might operate as a bar to our marriage?"

"And if I do, Miss Dare," said Mrs. Amry, with a lingering emphasis on each word, "how could I clear the name of your father? If Sir Allyn be in the power of Vincent Therwell, it will require more than ordinary power to free him. I cannot be perfectly frank with you as yet, for I am undecided exactly what to do. The truth is, I hold an important secret of Therwell's in my keeping. He thinks me dead. If he knew of my existence, and my being here at Edencourt, he would scruple at nothing to remove me from his path."

"You know something against him then?"

"I do. Something that I may not tell you now, but which you shall soon know. If that paper of which you have spoken were only destroyed I could move freely. I may however tell you that Therwell wronged me enough, embittered my life, dragged me from affluence, into poverty, and robbed me of the only thing that made life bright. For many years I have sought for him. I have wandered over the kingdom, stopping occasionally to earn money to continue my journey, being turned aside on false tracks continually, or coming upon him by chance years after he had vanished. I came here by accident—yet not exactly that. Providence must have guided my steps to your dwelling. You befriended me, and I will save you from this marriage."

"You will—you can?" cried Ilde, joyfully.

"I can and I will," replied Mrs. Amry, arising and speaking impressively. "I have power enough to prevent your marriage with Vincent Therwell, Miss Dare, but I must act cautiously lest your father be ruined. Your wedding is appointed for three weeks hence. Before a fortnight shall elapse you shall be free from Therwell's bonds."

Ilde yielded implicit faith to the promise so honestly and earnestly uttered.

"And my father?" she asked.

"For your father you must work yourself, Miss Dare. If I understood his secret I might benefit him. As I do not, I can only say try and get hold of that important paper, or induce one of the witnesses to betray the others. But rest assured this unsuitable marriage shall never take place."

With that assertion she quietly and silently withdrew before Ilde could question her further, leaving the girl's mind in a whirl of joyful yet painful emotions.

Could this woman save her, and could she herself save her father?

CHAPTER XXX.

> But there's sure vicissitude below,
> Of light and darkness, happiness and woe;
> The dawn of day is an approach to night,
> And grief is the conclusion of delight.
>
> *Young.*

The journey of Mr. Wilmer, with Mrs. Barrat and his unconscious captive, was of several hours' duration. He proceeded by lonely and unfrequented roads, avoiding towns and hamlets, and drove his swift limbed horses as furiously as their mettle would permit. The animals seemed almost to fly at times, and Mr. Wilmer regarded the panorama of trees, hedges, and dwellings with a grim and satisfied smile, frequently glancing backward to assure himself that no pursuer was emulating his mad speed.

"This is something like it, Jane," he muttered, his voice sounding unnatural as it issued through the false hair concealing his mouth. "At this rate we shall almost be housed before Adah's absence can be discovered at her home."

"Not quite," returned the ex-governess, with a glance at the young girl, who lay silent and helpless among her cushions. "We shall

get to our journey's end about nine o'clock, if we keep up as we are going."

"I should like to see Sir Hugh Chellis's face when he hears that she is gone!" declared Mr. Wilmer with a chuckling laugh. "He is in love with her, and I am inclined to think she is half in love with him. But she sent him away from Monrepos, luckily for me, and refused to live with him. He will probably search for her, and so will Captain Heddell. They can hardly suspect me of abducting her, since we took the precaution to leave our lodging-house the other day and report that we were going to the Continent. Do you suppose," he added, "that your cousin will be ready to receive us?"

"Certainly," was the response. "I saw her yesterday, and made every preparation for our coming. She is an avaricious old creature, and would do anything for money."

"Are you sure her house will be quite safe?"

"Safe! You will think so when you see it. It is at least five miles from any village, and situated in the loneliest spot that can be found on the whole coast. There isn't a neighbour within half a mile; but Maria doesn't care for that, since she is the most unsocial creature in the world. I am sure she needn't live as she does if she did not wish to do so, for she has a rich brother, who is about to make a splendid marriage!"

"Has she? Why, I didn't know you had any rich relations?"

"I haven't many; Vincent Therwell has become rich of late years. He used to be poor enough, goodness knows. Until I saw Maria yesterday I had no idea that he was anything more than a poor secretary, as he used to be. He has been a trader, and is now going to marry a baronet's daughter. Maria is as devoted to him as she is to money, and that is saying a great deal."

At this moment Lady Chellis stirred uneasily, and Mrs. Barrat saturated anew the drugged handkerchief and laid it upon her victim's face.

"There, your niece will not awaken now until we are perfectly ready to welcome her," said the ex governess. "I think, if you won't miss my society, Mr. Wilmer, I will doze a little myself!"

Her employer assuring her that he liked solitude, she leaned her head against the side of the vehicle, and was soon asleep.

When she awakened it was broad daylight, and they were nearing the sea, as was evidenced by the freshness of the air that blew into their faces. The horses had lost much of their vigour, but still kept on with persistent swiftness, urged by the frequent lash of their grim driver. The road they were traversing was thinly populated, houses being few and far between, but they caught glimpses now and then of pretty villages hidden in distant valleys, and of church spires crowning far-off hills, their gilded vanes shining in the morning sun.

At length they came in sight of the sea—a blue, restless, boundless stretch of water, flecked with white-crested waves, upon which a few fishing-vessels rocked gently, and over which hovered the broad-winged sea gulls. It was beautiful sight as it lay like a huge jewel beneath the early sun, but neither Mr. Wilmer nor Mrs. Barrat had eyes for beauty, and after an idle glance or two at the broad vista they engaged anew in conversation.

The morning was well advanced when the light vehicle proceeded slowly along a sandy lane leading directly to the sea. It was a quiet, desolate spot in which the travellers found themselves. Only one dwelling was within sight; the trees around were few, the vegetation scanty, and the rocks lining the coast were high, bold, and plentiful. In the expressive language of the fisherman of the neighbouring region this spot was called "the barren land," and one could not fail to recognize the appropriateness of the application.

As we have said, there was but one dwelling within view. That was a small stone house, standing in a sand-patch among the rocks, and with only a narrow strip of beach between it and the sea. Nothing could be imagined more lonely than the situation of this dwelling. It had been built by a romantically inclined London gentleman, who for a season or two had brought his family here to enjoy the sea-breezes, but the barrenness and desolation of the spot, the want of society, and the monotony of the scenery, had induced him soon after to sell it at a sacrifice to an individual to whom its drawbacks served as attractions.

It was to this house that the travellers were bound.

A stone wall encircled the path surrounding the cottage, and in the midst of the wall a carriage-gate was hung. Mr. Wilmer stopped his horses in front of this gate and alighted, and essayed to open it, but his efforts were fruitless. It was securely locked.

"This is strange," he said, in a tone of annoyance. "Hold the reins, Jane, while I go in search of your cousin."

He proceeded to the smaller gate, opened it without difficulty, and hastened up the path to the house. To his astonishment every door was locked, every window closed, and no one appeared in answer to his summons.

He returned angry and alarmed, to his confederate.

"She has gone," he said—"perhaps to betray us. Nothing remains for us but to beat a retreat as quickly as possible. What shall we do? Where shall we take Adah?"

"My cousin may have gone for a walk," suggested Mrs. Barrat, uneasily. She would never think of betraying us. Besides, she doesn't know who Adah is. Ah, what is that speck yonder on that wave?"

She pointed eagerly seaward. Mr. Wilmer looked in the direction indicated, and soon pronounced the object in question to be a small boat, and a farther scrutiny revealed the fact that it was occupied by a woman, and was being rapidly propelled shorewards.

Evidently they had been seen by the boatwoman, who was hastening to meet them.

As the boat came nearer, and the woman's figure was shown more plainly, the ex-governess exclaimed,—

"Yes, it's my cousin, Mrs. Garson. We are safe now, Mr. Wilmer—perfectly safe!"

She sprang out lightly as she spoke, and made her way down to the beach, where she awaited her relative's arrival.

Mr. Wilmer stationed himself beside his vehicle, where he could keep guard over his captive, and yet watch the approach of the boat with whose occupant he was as yet unacquainted.

The little skiff came on, urged by strong, rapid strokes, or rather sweeps of the oar, dealt by a powerful arm. In a few minutes the keel of the craft grated upon the sands, the rower sprang out, and Mrs. Barrat saluted her with many professions of affection.

Mrs. Garson was a woman past middle age. She was tall and masculine in appearance; her face was stern and strongly marked; her eyes were deeply set; her bony forehead was shaded by locks of iron grey; and she walked with long strides.

She had a brawny arm and strong, large, freckled hands, which almost crushed the more delicate ones of her cousin. Her attire consisted of a scant print gown, heavy shoes, and a print sun-bonnet that came far over her face, giving her countenance the appearance of being hidden within a cavern.

All this Mr. Wilmer observed while the woman received Mrs. Barrat's embraces. An instant later Mrs. Garson released herself, took from her boat a long string of freshly caught fish, and approached Mr. Wilmer.

"This is the gentleman I spoke of, cousin," said Mrs. Barrat, following her relative. "Mr. Wilmer, Mrs. Garson. Mr. Wilmer's niece is asleep in the carriage."

Mrs. Garson pushed back her bonnet and surveyed the gentleman narrowly as she gave him her hand.

There was something about her, despite the difference in their personal appearance, an indefinable resemblance to Therwell, and especially in his most sinister points. Mr. Wilmer felt at once that he could trust her to assist him in his nefarious projects, provided their relations were established upon a satisfactory basis. That they should be so established, and immediately, he determined.

Apparently satisfied with her scrutiny, Mrs. Garson produced a key and unlocked the carriage gate.

"You can drive in," she said, briefly, in a voice in consonance with her face. "There is the key of the stable at the back of the garden."

She gave him the key and passed into the garden, proceeding to the house. With another key she unlocked the front door, and admitted herself and her cousin to the interior of the dwelling.

It was pleasanter within than without. The hall floor was covered with matting, as was also that of the parlour, the door of which was ajar. At the back of the hall was a kitchen, and Mrs. Garson entered it at once. It was an exquisitely neat little looking room towards the sea, and was fitted up with dressers which were covered with the brightest of tin and pewter articles, and displayed also a small store of well-kept silver.

"I suppose you are hungry, Jane," said the mistress of the little domain. "I will get dinner for you while you see to your rooms. They are all ready for you. The north-east room that looks out on the sea is for your young lady. Make yourself at home."

Mrs. Barrat proceeded to obey the injunction. She removed her bonnet and shawl and then wandered into the parlour, which she mentally pronounced habitable. As she returned to the hall Mr. Wilmer made his appearance, bearing his niece in his arms.

"Bring her upstairs!" said Mrs. Barrat. "We may as well put her in her own room at once."

She led the way up to the chamber that had been designated as Adah's, and Mr. Wilmer followed, panting beneath his burden, which he was only too glad to deposit upon a couch. It was a sunny little room, hung with bright chintz curtains and furnished with a crimson carpet, a low neat bed, an easy-chair, a few books, a vase or two, and a chintz-draped couch. There were several engravings on the white-washed walls, and there was an evident attempt to achieve an air of elegance throughout the small apartment. The effect was slightly marred by the fact that the windows were nailed down and their lower halves covered with stout wire netting.

"How pleasant it is here!" said Mr. Wilmer, looking around him. "Who could have expected to find such a pretty room here?"

"This is Maria's brother's room, when he visits here," answered Mrs. Barrat, who had been examining the books and trinkets. "Vincent Therwell likes nothing that is ugly. I suppose that room adjoining is intended for me!"

She hastened to examine it. It had not the pleasant prospect of the outer room, its one window looking into the back garden, but it was very comfortable, and the ex-governess professed herself satisfied with it.

Returning to the outer room, she removed the bonnet of the still unconscious Lady Chellis, drew off her cumbersome cloak, and placed a pillow under her head.

"She will soon recover," she said, listening to the young bride's breathing. "She ought to be alone when she comes to her senses. Come!"

The confederates retired from the apartment, locking both doors behind them, and then

proceeded to look at Mr. Wilmer's room, which was exactly opposite to that of his niece, a narrow hall only intervening. It proved to be both comfortable and pleasant, and, well satisfied with their new quarters, the worthy couple went down to the parlour, where they remained until summoned by Mrs. Garson to breakfast.

It was a neat little repast she served to them, of new-laid eggs, fried fish, fresh bread, butter, and roasted potatoes. The travellers had appetites to enjoy it, and their hostess's stern features relaxed as she noticed how heartily they partook of the fare.

"Will Miss Wilmer have her breakfast now?" she asked.

"Not yet. She is asleep. I will take it up to her when she requires it," answered Mrs. Barrat.

"She is insane, you say?" asked the hostess, with a keen, furtive glance at the face of her guests—a glance wonderfully like that of her brother.

"Yes, she is unfortunately insane," said Mr. Wilmer. "I have hopes that the sea-air will cure her. Mrs. Barrat will attend upon her, and I shall also remain to watch over her. You have but to name your own price, Mrs. Garson, for your rooms and services during our stay. I know we can rely upon your thorough discretion, and that our affairs will be kept secret."

"I will do almost anything for money," said his hostess, grimly.

"Then we shall agree perfectly," was the brisk reply.

"Suppose we say thirty pounds a week for your board during your stay," remarked Mrs. Garson—"ten pounds each, you know, and ten pounds a week additional for the care of your horses. Then, a little present of fifty pounds when you go away would not be amiss. Upon these terms I would agree to keep even my own brother away from here. I live all alone, you know, and am my own servant. I think," she added, slowly and significantly, as Mr. Wilmer hesitated, "that, upon the terms I have mentioned, I should not trouble myself to investigate the insanity of the young lady upstairs. In short it would make no difference to me whether she were insane or not."

"Very well, then," exclaimed Mr. Wilmer, well pleased at this declaration. "It is agreed, then. There is the first instalment of your pay," and he tossed a purse into her lap. "If I succeed in my plans—that is" he added, correcting himself, "if my niece should recover you may receive even a better present than you have stipulated for."

Mrs. Garson's eyes gleamed suddenly and a gratified look overspread her face. She looked over the contents of the purse, then put it in her pocket, and declared that she would be faithful to the interests of her employer.

"By this time Miss Wilmer must be awake," said the ex-governess. "I will take up her dinner, Maria."

Mrs. Garson arose and produced from a tin oven in front of the fire the dinner she had prepared for the prisoner. A tray was covered with a fine damask napkin, a china plate was put upon it, and dishes were grouped around, containing eggs, fresh fish, toast, and a quivering lump of ruddy jelly. A small pot of tea and bowl of sugar were added, and the tray was given into Mrs. Barrat's hands.

"I don't know but bread and water would be more suitable for her," said the ex-governess, "but we can adopt that regimen at any time when it may be necessary."

She hastened upstairs with the tray, unlocked the door, and entered Lady Chellis's room.

The prisoner was still lying upon the couch but her position was changed. She was evidently upon the point of awakening, and Mrs. Barrat set down the tray upon a table and retreated into the back-ground.

Adah stirred uneasily, stretched out one hand, yawned, and then opened her eyes. For a moment she looked vacantly at the walls, without observing that they were not those of her own room, then the conviction burst upon her that she had not seen them before. She started wildly, sprang up, looked around her, and then her countenance fell upon the face of her former jailor.

In an instant the remembrance of the scene upon which she had closed her eyes came across her, and a realisation of her present position passed over her mind. With a wild and bitter cry, she sank back upon the couch.

"You know that you are not at home now, Miss Adah," said the ex-governess, her tones thrilling with the triumph of a petty and ignoble soul. "The other day you were mistress of my destiny and that of your uncle. To-day we are mistress of yours. You are no longer the free and happy possessor of an immense fortune. You are a prisoner and in our hands."

Again Lady Chellis moaned. But only for a moment did she permit her exulting foe to gloat over her anguish. Bewildered as she was, but half awakened, knowing nothing of her situation, unable to comprehend the sudden change in her fortunes, she yet, with a mighty effort, strove to calm herself and to regain her self-possession.

"I am not at Monrepos?" she said with another glance around the room.

"Not within eighty or a hundred miles of it."

Lady Chellis passed her hand over her forehead, as if to recall thinking faculties.

"I remember seeing Mr. Wilmer before I fell asleep," she said. "He drugged me I suppose, and carried me out of the house?"

The ex-governess bowed assent.

"And he has brought me a hundred miles from home? Where am I now?"

"That I am not at liberty to tell you," said Mrs. Barrat, with a disagreeable smile. "You can make any discoveries which you may be enabled to do, or you can question your uncle. He is the arbiter of your fate."

A sudden flush leaped up into the clear, dark cheeks of the captive bride. A sudden indignant light, like a flash of lightning through a gloomy sky, darted into her eyes—a scornful smile quivered her lovely lips, imbuing them with the vivid line of the carnation.

"I acknowledge no one but myself as the arbiter of my fate," she said, and her voice rang forth clearly and richly, like the tones of a silver bell, through the little room. "Mr. Wilmer has succeeded in stealing me from my home, but he cannot break my will to his. You may tell him so. And tell him, too, that, imprison me as long as he may now, he cannot place himself in his former position. He may report that I am insane, but if I were he would not gain one penny by my misfortune. And tell him," she added, impressively, "if I die here, it is not he who will benefit by my death. Sir Hugh Chellis will be my lawful heir."

"Why not tell him all this yourself, Miss Adah?" replied her jailor. "Your uncle is coming up to see you soon. You had better eat your breakfast, for you must feel weak after your long stupor. I will leave you to yourself."

Adah inclined her head haughtily and the widow withdrew.

On being left alone the young bride again arose and essayed to cross the floor to the window, but her brain reeled, a veil seemed drawn over her vision, and jarring tones sounded in her ears. She felt faint, weak and ill from the reaction of the powerful drug under which her senses had lain dormant so long.

"Am I going to be ill?" she murmured, with a sudden sensation of fear. "Ill, and far away from home, among deadly enemies! Oh Aunt Dorothy, Captain Heddell—Hugh!"

She faltered the last name, her voice dying away in a faint murmur.

"It must be that I am still suffering from that drug," she thought. "If so perhaps I can throw aside its effects. Surely they would not poison my food!"

Actuated by the instinct of self-preservation rather than that of hunger, she reached the little table, and poured out a cup of strong tea. Her first sip of the fragrant beverage was grateful to her fevered palate, and as she drank eagerly the fever mists cleared away from her brain, her vision became perfect, and she was herself again. She had no desire to assist her enemies in making a martyr of her, so she ate a little, and soon arose considerably strengthened and refreshed.

Her first movement was to look from the windows.

Her astonishment may well be imagined at beholding the wide expanse of sea spread before her gaze reaching almost up to the dwelling, its soft cooing murmur, as it lapped the shingly beach, sounding like sweet and gentle music. She gazed seaward, noticing the two or three distant fisher's sails, and then glanced at the barren rocky shore.

"How solitary and desolate it all looks!" she murmured.

In vain she looked from each of the three windows, two of which only turned towards the sea, for some dwelling mansion or hut. Not a human habitation met her gaze. Nothing was to be seen except on the one hand a meadow, where only the rankest of vegetation grew, and even that was choked up with great shining patches of white sand in many places, and on the other the glittering sea, whose music now took, as it seemed to to her, a strangely mocking tone.

"There is no hope of help for me from without!" she sighed. "Hugh could never find me here, even if he were to look for me. But he will not look. I sent him away, and even now he may be on his way to the Continent. And dear Aunt Dorothy and Captain Heddell might search for ages for me without finding my hiding place. I have myself no idea where I am."

She walked across the floor once or twice restlessly, opened the books, hoping to obtain some clue to their owner, and then looked out of the window again. Her bewildered mind puzzled itself to discover some motive for her abduction, and she regarded the subject in every possible light without being able to satisfy herself.

"Yes," she mused, "if Mr. Wilmer has brought me here to die, it is Sir Hugh and not he who would benefit by my death. He cannot have any hope of being allowed to manage my property. He cannot have shut me up here on the plea of insanity without an object. I am positive that this is a private house and not a lunatic asylum. I can find but one reason for his conduct, and that seems but half-plausible. Can he have shut me up here for revenge?"

She asked herself the question in a hollow whisper. And while the sound yet lingered on her lips Mr. Wilmer's step was heard in the passage, and the key grated in the lock of her door.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Let it not seem strange to you
That here one strange thing more you see.
Moore.

Mr. Wilmer entered the presence of his imprisoned niece with an exultant expression on his sinister face and a baleful and triumphant light in his eyes. His disguise, which he still wore, gave him a ruffianly look, and the young bride shrank before him and grew pale as she observed it and marked the glance he levelled upon her, realising how much she was in his power, how thoroughly she was at his mercy. But only for a moment did she give way to natural weakness. She summoned back her courage and self-possession, by one supreme effort, and took a step forward confronting him.

"Good morning, Adah," he said, with a

mocking bow, pausing near the door. "I hope you find yourself well this morning?"

She did not deign a response.

"Yesterday," remarked Mr. Wilmer, still mockingly, "it was your pleasure to treat me scornfully and to see me kicked ignominiously from your presence. The wheel of fortune has turned, and this morning it is I who am strong and you who are weak!"

"Tell me, Mr. Wilmer," said the maiden, haughtily, not heeding his self-congratulations, "what means this outrage? Why have you stolen me from my home?"

"You ask what I have come to explain. But, first, allow me to ask if you have looked from the windows and observed what a desolate place this is? I question if in all the kingdom a more barren and solitary shore can be discovered. No one, except occasional fishermen, ever come to this spot, and, if you were to see and speak to them, you would scarcely make yourself understood for they speak a barbarious dialect!"

Adah shuddered slightly, and again her relative smiled.

"With regard to the household," he continued, "it consists of but one person beside our party, and that person is the cousin and friend of Mrs. Barrat. So, appeals to her would be useless. Do you begin to comprehend your utter helpfulness?"

"I see that you have laid your plans skilfully."

"Have I not? But some of the praise is due to you my dear niece, for had you not dismissed Sir Hugh from your home I could never have effected your abduction."

A keen pang of regret pierced the soul of the young bride, and she thought of the young husband whose love she had rejected with a remorseful bitterness.

Banishing her thoughts of him, she said, coldly,—

"It is not necessary to explain to me how I happened to be brought here. I comprehend the whole story perfectly. But what has been your object in abducting me? Do you seek revenge for your changed fortunes?"

"No, no, Adah," and he strove to speak carelessly, "I am not so romantic as that. I own I should like to see you suffer for my humiliations, but I have not brought you here to wreak a useless revenge upon you. Instead, I intend that you shall enrich me from your overflowing stores!"

'Enrich you? How?"

"In the simplest way possible. You are rich and I am poor. You are married and have come into control of your immense fortune. Your draft for any amount would be honoured at sight. But, rich as you are, there is one thing you lack—your liberty! Money without freedom to use it is worth nothing. So long as you are imprisoned your wealth is but a bitter mockery. So, I propose to make an exchange with you. You shall give me a part of your money and I will restore your freedom!"

Lady Chellis drew up her proud, slender figure, and looked at him with eyes which almost blazed in their haughty scorn.

"So you have taken up the profession of a brigand?" she said, with a disdainful voice and curling lip. "The measure of your degradation is at last full. I can imagine no lower depths for you to plunge into."

Mr. Wilmer scowled darkly, and moved uneasily under the fixed and scornful gaze of her star-like eyes. It seemed to him that they could pierce even to the bottom of his ignoble soul and spy out every meanness and weakness of his petty nature. But not a shadow of compunction troubled him. Instead, he was angry at his manifest degradation, and determined to exact a larger compensation for his uncomfortable position.

"Say and think what you like, Adah," he said, doggedly, "the fact remains the same; here you are, and here you will stay until you have paid me the ransom I demand!"

(To be continued.)

CONSTANCE CAREW.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE THREAT BEARS FRUIT.

"TAKE me while I'm in the humour," is a piece of advice peculiarly applicable to persons of either sex, who are contemplating matrimony. It is true, sometimes, that obstacles to the successful issue of his suit increase the fervour of a man's love; but this very rarely happens when he has passed middle age, when the impetuosity of youth has left him, and when the charms of the lady of his choice are very palpably upon the wane.

This at any rate is the case with Captain Carew. He had fully intended to marry Mrs. Treleaven; nay, he was eager to do so, until the question of settlements came to divide them, followed by a quarrel with that lady's family, and accompanied by insulting speeches which he is not likely either to forgive or to forget.

So the matter is ended, in Captain Carew's opinion, and he is secretly congratulating himself upon his freedom, when a letter reaches him from Mrs Treleaven, expressing her willingness to fulfil her part of the engagement without settlements of any kind.

The surrender is so unconditional, that the captain at once suspects a trap.

He remembers hearing Leonard Catchbull say, derisively,—

"Why make a bother about settlements, when a married woman's property is her own, and her husband can't touch a sixpence of it without her leave?"

The argument had fallen upon deaf ears at the time, Kate Treleaven being quite sure that Captain Carew would gain so much influence over her mother, when she became his wife, that she would be induced to sign away any property that was left at her disposal.

Captain Carew, however, had thought the matter over from his own stand-point, had realized that the law with regard to the property of a married woman is not what it was when he first married, and although, to do him justice, he loved Mrs. Treleaven for herself, and not for her money, he had no intention whatever of marrying her without it.

Such were his feelings at the time of the quarrel; since then his affection has cooled, he has more than once congratulated himself upon the turn affairs have taken, and therefore it is distinctly inconvenient, not to say annoying, to be called upon at this stage to carry out his part of the engagement.

The immediate cause of this worry is to make him avoid the society of his daughter, who might, he fears, question him upon the subject. It also takes him to Exeter again and again to consult his lawyers; so he does not observe that Constance is more restless and ill at ease than usual.

Thus it happens that the bolt comes upon him as "from a blue sky," when, a few days after his daughter's interview with Catchbull (of which he is still unaware), while he and Constance and Myra are sitting over rather a late breakfast, a servant brings him a card upon a salver, and glancing at it he reads,—"Mr David Moor, Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard, Whitehall."

He turns the card over, mutters indistinctly something that sounds like anything but a blessing; then says briefly to the servant,—

"Show him into the study," and proceeds to finish his coffee and his cutlet.

But his appetite for his breakfast is gone, and, with a muttered apology, he rises from the table and goes to see what Mr. David Moor, hailing from Scotland Yard, can possibly want of him.

A short interval elapses; then the housemaid returns with a message from the Captain, requesting his daughter to come to him.

Constance rises at once to obey.

The danger which she has feared and derided by turns, has come upon her at last, and she has no choice but to meet it.

Fortunately for her, she is in this crisis almost unnaturally calm.

She has suffered so much in anticipation, that emotion seems deadened within her, just as a person who has been hysterical with the fear of death, at last meets the grim terror bravely.

Her cheek may be a little paler than usual, otherwise she shows neither fear nor pleasure when her father says,—

"This is Mr. Moor from Scotland Yard, Constance. He comes to see you rather than me."

She bows, regards the stranger steadily, and waits to be questioned.

"Better sit down," says the Captain, handing her a chair, and indicating one for the visitor.

Constance takes the seat, the visitor from Scotland Yard seats himself likewise; he is a gentlemanly-looking man, and is favourably impressed with the fair, proud face before him.

"My object in coming here this morning, Miss Carew, is to ask you a few questions," he says, gravely. "You will answer them or not, as you please; but I give you the customary warning that anything you say may be used against you."

"Thank you," she replies, calmly, "I will answer you to the best of my knowledge and ability."

"Thank you, I believed that you would," he responds, courteously. "You travelled from Paddington to Teignmouth on the twentieth of July, alone I believe?"

She answers in the affirmative, and then step by step, piece by piece, he gathers from her the story of her journey, down to her leaving the train at Exeter. Then she repeats to him the same account she had given Catchbull about her going to the refreshment room for a cup of tea, and getting into another carriage to complete her journey.

"And you left your book behind in the carriage, I presume?" he asks.

"I suppose so," she replies.

"Did you see in the papers that the owner of that book was requested to claim it?" he asks.

"No, I never read the newspapers," she replies. "I have never read an account of this dreadful matter. I have only heard fragments at various times from friends."

"That is undoubtedly true," here interposes Captain Carew, "I have always forbidden my daughter to read any part of a newspaper that I have not given her to look at."

A scarcely perceptible shrug from Mr. Moor of Scotland Yard follows this declaration, then he says,—

"That being the case, you are probably unaware that a solicitor, named Catchbull, yesterday applied for a warrant for your arrest, Miss Carew, on a charge of wilful murder."

"How infamous!" she exclaims, startled to indignation by Catchbull's audacity.

"Yes," assents the visitor, with a slight drawl; "the evidence he could produce would not justify such a step, so the matter was left for the time in the hands of the police. Can you tell us what motive Mr. Catchbull had for thus accusing you?"

"Scarcely," she replies, with natural hesitation; "but Mr. Catchbull forced his conversation upon me the other day. He talked about the book I had lost, and I told him about my journey as I have told you. Then he said I was in his power, and offered me the choice of marrying him, or going to prison."

"And you refused to marry him?"

"I did," she replies.

"I should think you did!" exclaims Captain Carew, indignantly. "I should have refused my consent in any case."

"Very unprofessional conduct on his part,"

remarks Mr. Moor; "but please give me your attention a little longer, Miss Carew."

"On this occasion you travelled first-class, I suppose."

She answers, "Yes."

"Did you observe the face of your companion?" he continues, "the gentleman, I mean, who was in the same carriage with you from London to Exeter."

"Yes, and I think I should recognise it anywhere," she replies, and she describes him as clearly as she can.

"Was he at all like this?" he asks, handing her a photograph.

This is the portrait of a large, full-faced country squire, and she returns it at once with an emphatic,—

"Not at all."

"Or like either of these?" he continues, and he hands her two more *cartes de visite*.

"This is the man!" she exclaims, selecting one of the two, while her eyes dilate and her face is full of excitement. "Who was he? what was his name?" she asks, with an eagerness not born of hope, but of apprehension.

"Mr. Alfred Randlemere," he replies gravely.

"The gentleman to whom my schoolfellow, Margaret Saunderson, was engaged to be married!" she exclaims, turning to her father. "Oh this is dreadful! dreadful!"

She wrings her hands as she speaks. She is so distressed for her friend, that she does not realise how she is increasing the gravity of her own position, and even the voice of the man from Scotland Yard fails to warn her as he asks,—

"Why is it dreadful? you did not harm him."

"No, I did not harm him," she replies, evasively. "I was thinking of my poor friend, and of the grief it will be to her."

"I have no doubt it will," he assents. "I suppose you can throw no more light upon his fate, Miss Carew?"

"No, I can tell you nothing more about him," she answers, in a nervous shrinking manner, which raises the suspicion that she knows much more on the subject, whether she can tell it or not.

That she cannot be induced at present to say any more or to make any further statement is quite certain, for she sits with her lips closed, her hands tightly clasped; very pale, and labouring under such repressed excitement that her father, who fears that she may completely break down, asks anxiously,—

"Are you satisfied, sir? is there any need to detain my daughter any longer?"

"No. I will not detain Miss Carew any longer to-day," is the reply; "but I am afraid that she has not heard the last of this matter. You will not misunderstand me, I feel assured, when I say that anything like flight would be most disastrous."

"I shall not run away" says Constance, trying to speak emphatically, though her lip quivers "I have done no wrong, and what I have told you is the truth."

He bows gravely, and she returns his parting salutation and leaves the room.

"Well," asks Captain Carew when his daughter is gone; "what do you make out of it?"

"I believe that Miss Carew has told us the truth, but I doubt if she has told us the whole truth," is the reply. Can there be anyone whom she wishes to shield?"

"Not that I know of," replies the Captain. "This is the first I have heard about the matter; but what a scoundrel that fellow Catchbull must be!"

"Yes, it was sharp practice," assents Mr. Moor, "particularly on such slender evidence; but I can understand that he was very much in love with the young lady."

"In love with her money, sir; that is all he is capable of being in love with," cries the irate father. "He does not enter my doors again, if I know it."

"He certainly overshot his mark in this instance," is the response. "But it is a grave matter, further investigation is imperative; and if Miss Carew is hiding anything in the hope of screening another person it will be desirable for her own comfort and safety that she divulges it. Perhaps you will try to impress this upon her mind."

"I will," returns the Captain; "but I hope you are mistaken in your surmise. I cannot understand how she can know about what took place in that compartment of the carriage which she left, nor who she can possibly want to screen. She has no lover, she is not engaged to anybody. And I was at the house of a friend that evening. I did not meet her at the railway station as she anticipated, but left word for her to follow me to the house at which I was spending the evening. She did not come, and I returned home at the request of my friends to see the reason why. I found her in bed, ill, and she was not herself for several days afterwards."

"You say she was ill," cries the detective quickly, "did she say anything at the time which seemed strange to you?"

"I don't recollect," replies Captain Carew slowly; but even as he speaks, it flashes back upon his memory that on this eventful evening his daughter, though asleep had started up in bed and was crying "Blood! blood!" and pointing towards himself as he stood in the doorway. His face changes under the keen eyes gazing upon him so steadily, and he answers evasively,—

"I don't know; nothing struck me at the time, except that she was over-tired, and over-excited, and the latter I attributed to quite another cause; but I will think the matter over, I will talk with my daughter. I am as anxious to have this matter cleared up as anybody can be; you believe that, I hope?"

"Certainly," is the answer, "and I believe, also, that if Miss Carew is hiding anything, it is to shield another, not herself. But you know, Captain, in a matter so grave as this appears to be, silence which will defeat the ends of justice makes the person maintaining it an accomplice after the fact. Perhaps you will explain that to your daughter. Good morning."

And he goes away, leaving Captain Carew in as unenviable a frame of mind as he well can be.

For a time the anxious father paces the study with troubled steps; then he goes to seek his daughter, partly to speak a few words of encouragement and sympathy, principally to tell her what the detective has said about his suspicions, that she has not spoken the whole truth, or, in other words, that she has not stated all that she knows about this unfortunate matter.

But Constance has retired to her own room "and locked herself in," according to Jenifer; but this precaution, the woman explains, is taken to prevent Miss Myra from forcing her company upon her, and not to hide herself from her father.

The Captain, however, has no desire to disturb his daughter, he can quite understand that she wishes to be alone for a while, to collect her thoughts and face her position; but being alone is exactly what does not suit him, though there are very few people whom he would care to take into his confidence.

Still, he feels that he must talk about the matter to somebody who has an interest in his daughter only second to his own.

Sir Wilfred Marshall is away from home; he left Nutcombe Park with his sister and her husband several days ago, and will not return until this evening or to-morrow.

Eric Balderson likewise is gone, and of the two, Captain Carew would rather seek the advice of the artist than of the baronet; it would wound his pride less to do so, because the latter is a suitor for his daughter's hand, and it is just possible that when he hears of this foul charge against her he may withdraw his suit as from one not worthy to bear his name.

As for the artist, he has taken a great fancy to him. He believes his friendship to be returned; he knows him to be a man upon whom he can rely, to whom, in case of emergency, he could appeal for moral support, for such affectionate care as a father might ask from a son; and though he is worldly enough to prefer Sir Wilfred as a husband for his daughter, he would be by no means disappointed if she were to marry Balderson.

"If he had only told me that he cares for Constance more than for any other friend, I would telegraph for him," muses the old soldier, as with troubled countenance and heavy heart he paces slowly along the sea-wall in the direction of Smuggler's Cave; "but under the circumstances I don't feel justified. He is a man with a profession, with his way to make in the world, and I couldn't offer to pay his fare or to compensate him for the time he would lose. No, I haven't the conscience to do it. Ah! the very girl to help me!"

This last exclamation is caused by the sight of Edith Culver, who, with the nurse and Mrs. Ralstone's children, is coming straight towards him.

"Oh, Captain Carew!" exclaims Edith, advancing towards him with outstretched hand; "I do so want to speak to you or Constance about something that concerns one or both of you."

"And I want to speak to you," he replies, quite as cordially. "Leave the children with their nurse, and let us walk on."

"I dare not," she answers. "I should be dismissed on my return if I were to do so. Mrs. Ralstone refused me permission to come to your house an evening or two ago. I have given her notice, and shall leave at the end of the month; that has made her so disagreeable, I suppose. Constance told you about my legacy, didn't she?"

"I suppose so," he returns, vaguely; "but confound the woman, you are not her slave. She's Catchbull's sister, isn't she?"

"Yes!"

"Then let her say or do what she likes," he says, in his unconsciously overbearing manner, in which his daughter so much resembles him. "Come with me now, and if she makes a fuss when you return, pack up your traps and come to us; Constance will be glad to have you!"

Edith needs no further persuasion, though she is a little astonished when Captain Carew takes her hand, links it in his arm, and says in confidential tones,—

"I've something very important to say to you."

Then, observing the doubt in her eyes, he adds,—

"Something about Constance."

After this she lends a willing ear to his conversation, while the angry nurse goes back to her employer to describe how Miss Culver has gone walking arm-in-arm with the gay "Capting;" and Myra Barlow, who is by the side of James Tealeaven, draws his attention to the distant couple, and asks, with a sneer,—

"There, what would your mother say if she saw that, I wonder?"

"Say that he ought to be shot!" is the excited reply. "Why, he's openly making love to that girl, and my mother expects him to marry her."

Myra laughs, for Tealeaven's words imply that mischief will come of this little episode, and she is a girl who always derives a great deal of enjoyment from the misfortunes or vexations of others.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I SHALL NOT TURN BACK NOW."

CONSTANCE, on leaving the presence of the detective, has gone to her own room and locked herself in.

The end has come! The discovery which she so much dreaded is now no longer the

secret of one or two persons, but is, or will shortly be, the property of many. Her name has actually been associated by that contemptible Catchbull with the fearful crime of murder; and though his application for her arrest has failed, she is fully alive to the fact that her liberty is in peril, and that any hour may find her a prisoner.

Yet she has no personal fear, because in the first place she is conscious of her own innocence, and in the second—little as she knows of the law—she understands that there is no evidence beyond the finding of her book and her own admissions to connect her with the crime.

But it is of her own admissions that she is most afraid. The haunting dread is upon her that she has already said more than she intended; that she has created the impression in the mind of the detective that she has told only half of the truth, and, if she is right in her surmise, she knows full well that he will not rest until he has learnt the whole.

The difficulty of keeping her own counsel and of acting with judgment uninfluenced by fear is great upon her. She feels as if she must speak to somebody of what is so ever present to her mind, and yet, to speak is to betray the man for whom she is ready to sacrifice her own life.

In this frame of mind she spends the whole morning, and she is only roused to the necessity of keeping up appearances by hearing the sound of the gong for luncheon.

She glances in the looking-glass at her own reflection, but her face is too fair and too young to bear any deep traces of the mental anguish she suffers.

Her cheeks are pale, it is true, her eyes look large and hollow and particularly bright, and there is a nervousness about her manner that is new to her; but otherwise she is presentable enough, and she descends to the dining-room and takes her place at the head of the table, calmly and a trifle absently, perhaps, but so little changed is she that Myra's keen eyes fail to notice any difference.

Captain Carew is also silent. Both father and daughter feel Myra's presence to be a restraint upon them, and the former is greatly inclined to ask that young lady when she is going back to town.

He refrains from doing so, however, and, acting upon Elijah Calvas's advice, he does not cross-question his daughter as he had intended to do, but waits, with what patience he can command, for the explanation which he is assured will be forthcoming.

Constance does not volunteer any statement, however; on the contrary, directly the meal is over she goes back again to her own room, feeling that Myra's ill-natured chatter will be insupportable.

A careless remark made by her father has disturbed her greatly, for, in reply to a question from Myra, he said,—

"Sir Wilfred Marshall will be home this evening, and I shall see him to-morrow." Then, with a glance at his daughter, the Captain added, "He wishes to be remembered to you, Constance."

"Sir Wilfred coming home!" that is the thought that takes possession of her mind. He is coming home; he will hear of this accusation against her; he will know that she is innocent, that if anyone can be called guilty it is he, and will at once come forward and surrender himself to the hands of justice.

She forgets how bitterly disappointed she has felt at the indifference he has shown with regard to the fate of the man whom she believes met his death at his hands. She forgets how she chilled his first declaration of love by asking, "Is that all?" having prepared herself for an explanation of what did occur in the tunnel on that evening of the 20th of July. All these things pass out of her mind now; even the severe things she has thought of him with regard to his complete silence on this subject are gone from her memory.

Two things only are present with her for the rest of the day. The first, that she loves him—and how devotedly and unselfishly she loved him she never knew till now; the second is that he must be warned of his danger, and entreated to fly while there is yet time.

But how can he be warned? Who can she send on such a mission?

Her father would not go for such a purpose. He would call her mad, and would be the first to blazon forth the secret she strives to hide.

If Eric Balderson were here she might trust him, he would be faithful to her, and would try also to save the man whom he calls his friend. But she cannot send for Eric, and if she did, he could not arrive in time to do her bidding.

Neither dare she send the warning in writing; to do so would more fatally compromise both herself and him. It must be given in his ear, he must be told of his peril face to face; and who is there that can do this but herself?

At first she shrinks with dread from the task.

How can she look into the eyes that ever beam on her own with love, and tell him that she believes his hand to be red with the life-blood of a fellow-man, and to urge him, not nobly to come forward and demonstrate his innocence, or take the just punishment of his guilt, but to slink away and hide himself like a coward, while the shadow of his crime will always cloud her life!

"No! no! a thousand times no!" she tells herself, she cannot do it; and yet the day drags on, the shades of evening draw near, and whatever she decides to do must be done soon, or the very opportunity of saving him will be gone for ever.

A knock at her door, two or three times repeated, makes her open it and admit Jenifer.

The old woman looks grave, and there are unshed tears in her eyes, for she loves Constance as a child of her own, and some whisper of the foul charge that has been made against her darling has already reached her ears. That Constance is innocent of having injured any mortal being she is firmly convinced, but that she knows who did commit the crime she is likewise sure, for she remembers the excited condition in which she arrived home that evening, her delirious cries about "blood! blood!" and she has felt certain ever since that the girl carries some secret in her heart, the burden of which is more than she can bear.

Once, it will be remembered, she entreated her young mistress to confide her trouble to her, so that she might more easily bear the weight that was crushing all hope and happiness out of her life; but Constance would not do it then, and Jenifer does not ask her now. She understands that the matter is too grave to be even talked over, and she wishes to imply by her presence and her sympathetic glances, not only that she is overwhelmed with grief, but that she would gladly do anything in her power to help her darling.

"Where is my father?" asks Constance, calmly.

"He's gone out, dearie," is the reply; "he said he shouldn't be home to dinner, and he said something about lawyers, that made me think he's run up to Exeter."

"And Miss Myra?" asks the lady, "where is she?"

"Well, I could scarcely believe my ears," says Jenifer, "but after the master was gone, she said she wasn't going to stay home alone, and she was going somewhere with Miss Nellie Treleaven and her brother, and she's gone."

"Then I am alone," says Constance, thoughtfully.

"Yes, dearie, and cook says she hasn't any orders for dinner," returns the woman.

"I don't want dinner, I will have some tea," says the girl, absently; then with sudden resolution she adds, "Jenifer, I know I can trust you. I want you to help me."

"Anything in my power, dearie, and I'll be as silent as the grave," is the earnest response.

"Don't talk of graves," cries Constance, with a shiver; "order me some tea and then get ready to go out."

Her commands are obeyed, the tea is brought, and Jenifer is waiting with her bonnet on.

"I want you to go to the railway station," says the young lady, glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece. "The train from London will be due in less than half-an-hour: wait for it; observe well if Sir Wilfred Marshall arrives by it, and if he is alone. You understand."

"Yes, dearie; am I to speak to him?"

"If he is alone and you can do so without pushing forward or attracting attention, do," replies Constance. "If you can speak to him without being noticed or overheard, ask him to come to me at once—you can say that it is important that I should see him. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I'm to speak to him if he is near me, but I'm not to push forward to speak to him as if I'd come with a message."

"No, you are not to let anyone but him suppose that you've come with a message," is the emphatic charge.

"I'll do just as you tell me, dearie," and the woman starts off upon what she feels to be a mysterious mission.

She seems to be absent a very long time to the girl who is so anxiously waiting for her return. When she does come, she is alone.

"I've seen him, dearie," says old Jenifer, breathlessly; "but I couldn't get a nigh him without pushing past folks and interrupting him, as you said I wasn't to do."

"Then he has come?" asks the girl, with a long-drawn sigh.

But whether the sigh is indicative of pleasure or of pain, of relief or of suspense, Jenifer cannot tell.

"Yes, he's come," assents the woman. "I don't know if he came alone, but he's gone home alone with his servant in his dog-cart. There was lots of folks who knew him, and shook hands with him, so he didn't see me; though I was most a mind to go and pluck him by the coat-sleeve."

"He is gone home, and he is alone," muses Constance. "Thank you, Jenifer."

This is equivalent to dismissal for the time, but Jenifer is unwilling to leave the room without offering some consolation, and she asks, timidly,—

"Would you like me to go to Nutcombe Park with a note, dearie?"

"No; leave me for a time while I think of what is best to be done," says the girl.

And the woman reluctantly obeys.

Half-an-hour later, the young lady's bell rings, and Jenifer answers it.

"I want you to go for a walk with me down by the shore," says Constance, with seeming carelessness.

"Yes, dearie, a walk will do you good," assents the woman. "Shall I help you to dress?"

"No, thank you, get yourself ready," is the reply. "The air is cool to-night, isn't it?"

"Yes, much cooler, and the wind's rising," is the answer.

If Constance hears, she does not heed this last remark. She has come to a resolution which, under any less trying circumstances, she would believe to be impossible.

But, whatever her intention may be, she says nothing to Jenifer when they start for their walk.

The servant is dressed quietly in a manner befitting her station; the young lady is dressed as she would be any other day, except that her clothes are dark in colour, and in no way likely to attract attention.

There is no moon to-night, and the sea moans, and the wind sobs in a mournful manner; and the promenade, when they reach it, is almost deserted, for it is now quite eight o'clock, and twilight is deepening into night.

For a while the two women walk along in silence. No one observes them, no one

["THIS IS THE MAN!" CONSTANCE EXCLAIMS, SELECTING ONE OF THE TWO PHOTOGRAPHS.]

follows them; the sea is on their right, the railway line, cut out of the red cliffs, to their left; and in the distance, straight before them, is the promontory, locally known as the "Parson and Clerk," that shelters Smuggler's Cove.

"The wind blows cold," remarks Jenifer, at length.

"Does it?" responds Constance, absently.

"And the tide's coming in; we shall have a rough night," continues the woman.

"Yes," assents the girl, and still on she walks, Jenifer finding it as much as she can do to keep pace with her.

The sobbing of the wind, the moaning of the sea, the darkness that makes everything seem weird and strange and fearful, and the consciousness that on the exposed side of the sea-wall the water is now so deep that to fall into it would mean certain death, all help to make this walk one to be remembered by old Jenifer as long as she lives.

Constance is scarcely conscious of her external surroundings, so great is the strain upon her mind.

To her the darkness is welcome, because it hides her from the gaze of those who, if they recognised her, might dog her footsteps. The high wind cools her fevered brow, and there is something soothing to her highly-wrought nerves in the gurgling lap of the waves as they break upon the side of the sea-wall, and splash and roar and fall back upon themselves because they may come no farther.

"Shall we turn back now, dearie?" asks Jenifer, as they come near to the entrance of Smugglers' Cove.

"No!" is the quiet answer.

"But where are you going?" asks the woman, in dismay.

"Hush! I am going to Nutcombe Park," is the answer, almost whispered in her ear.

"Good heavens! Miss Constance, are you mad?" demands Jenifer, with a strange mixture of terror and of outraged propriety.

"I don't know," replies Constance, quietly; "but I am going, mad or sane."

"But we can't go this way!" cries the woman, fearfully, "the tide is high, and it will be at the peril of our lives if we try to go down them steps, and along the narrow ledge under the railway arch in the darkness, for I don't doubt the waves are washing over it. Oh, Miss Constance, I'll go anywhere with you, even to the end of the world, but don't'ee ask me to go to my death!"

"No; I never thought of the tide being high, nor of the night being too dark for us to see our way," replies the girl, pressing her hands upon her throbbing brows. "You are right, Jenifer turn back, the danger is too great for me to ask you to share it."

"But you will come back, dearie? You won't go on alone?" Jenifer asks, fearfully.

"It would have been safer to have gone by the road," replies Constance; "but I shall not turn back now."

She takes a step forward, and as she does so a train emerges from the tunnel, which is only a little way before them, comes on over the bridge that spans the Cove, flashes past, and rushes on at a mad pace towards Teignmouth.

The sight of the train reminds Jenifer that human beings cannot be far distant, and makes her more clearly realise the impossibility of leaving her young mistress to go to Nutcombe Park alone, while it has the effect upon Constance of reminding her most forcibly of the object she came out this evening to accomplish, and also that she has not a moment to lose.

But even her courage, born of desperation as it is, encounters a severe test as she takes hold of the frail railing and gropes her way down the steps which lead from the sea-wall to the ledge of masonry that goes under the railway arch, and is the only way of getting from hence to Smugglers'-lane, which leads up to the main road.

With plenty of light, when the tide is low, this narrow pathway presents no danger—nay, you may dispense with it altogether, and walk along the sandy beach to the entrance of the Cove. But in the dense darkness, with the tide running high, the attempt to pass this spot is full of danger, and Jenifer's cry,—

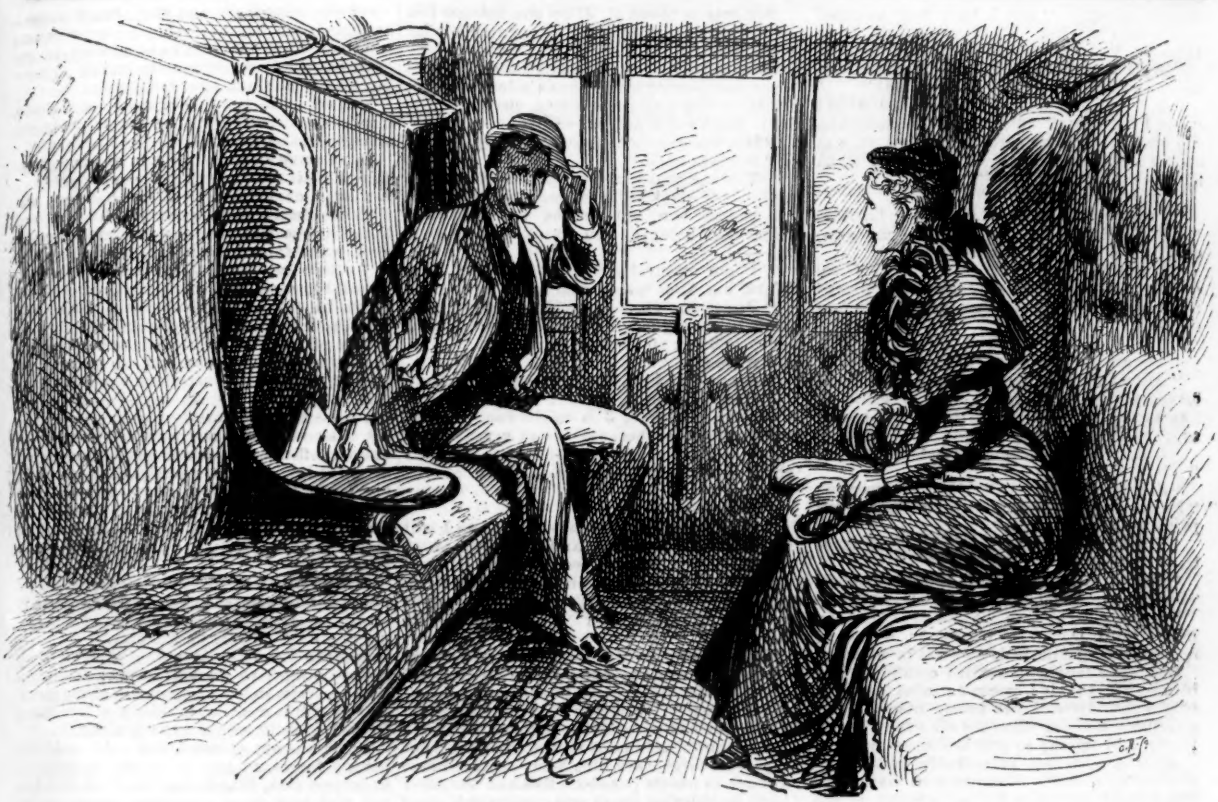
"Miss Constance, leave the rail, and keep close to the wall!" comes only just in time to save our heroine from stepping right out into the sea, which is here fully ten feet deep.

So far, however, she is uninjured, and a second or two afterwards a flash of light illumines the arch of the bridge, dazzles the eyes of the two terrified women, and shows them the narrow path along which they have to come; while by their side, and splashing their feet, is the restless and treacherous water.

(To be continued.)

In the Chicago "World's Fair" a newspaper office is to be set up, and all the staff, from the editor downwards, will be on view to the public while the exhibition is open. The work is to go on in precisely the same manner as if one and all were behind the sacred veil which generally hides the editorial powers that be.

Gold is so very tenacious that a piece of it drawn into wire one twentieth of an inch in diameter will sustain a weight of 500 pounds without breaking. Its malleability is so great that a single grain may be divided into 2 000 000 parts, and a cubic inch into 9 523 809 523 parts, each of which may be distinctly seen by the naked eye. A grain and a half of gold may be beaten into leaves of one inch square, which, if intercepted by parallel lines drawn at right angles to each other and distant only the one hundredth part of an inch, will produce 25 000 000 little squares, each of which can be distinctly seen without the aid of a glass.



["CAPTAIN TRAFFORD, AT YOUR SERVICE, MISS WARD!"]

NOVELETTE.]

A TERRIBLE MUDDLE.

CHAPTER I.

THEY had been engaged for years, and yet no one knew exactly when they were to be married.

It was generally known that they were "appropriated," but as their abodes were far distant, and they never visited each other, their respective friends might be forgiven for not taking very much interest in the affair, and regarding it as rather in the clouds.

"Trafford's an awfully good fellow," some officer in the Captain's regiment would remark to a feminine friend. "He's engaged to someone in England; hasn't seen her for years, but he manages to keep pretty cheerful considering. I should say his heart wasn't particularly in the affair."

So much for one side. Regarding the other, Alice Ainslie was a very pretty little girl, but her fortune was limited to a hundred a year, and the indulgent aunt, with whom she lived, owed her comforts to a very handsome annuity which, as it died with her, left her powerless to provide for her darling, and made her view the engagement with rather favourable eyes.

"Dull, Alice!" she would exclaim, if the child ventured to complain of the monotony of her lot. "Why, I am sure you wouldn't wish to be going to all sorts of gaieties while Captain Trafford is abroad. A young lady whose *fiancé* is away should always keep herself in as much seclusion as possible."

Whereupon Alice pouted, and asked if Mrs. Ward wouldn't like to shut her up in a convent; or, if in a specially mutinous mood, she would inquire, gravely, whether her aunt supposed Captain Trafford kept *himself* in seclusion, considering his regiment was at one of the gayest stations in India.

"It's quite absurd, you know, Aunt Dorothy," the naughty child would conclude, "for I don't believe Jim means to marry me at all. It's eight years since he went abroad, and I believe he is as tired of the whole affair as I am."

"It was your father's wish," began Mrs. Ward, sententiously. Truth to say, she found it hard to forgive her dead brother for thus disposing of his only child; but in public she always stood up for respect being paid to the dead man's wishes. "You know, Alice, he had the highest opinion of all the Traffords."

"It wasn't that," explained Alice, who had a painful love of frankness. "Sir Edmund Trafford had a law suit with my grandfather, the loss of which nearly ruined him, and made mamma, instead of an heiress, nothing but a penniless girl with a long pedigree, and the old man seems to have repented on his deathbed, and charged his son with making restitution. Sir Richard wrote to my father, and they agreed to bury the hatchet. Instead of any part of the property changing hands, they entered into a solemn league and covenant that some day or other I should marry Jim."

"My child, whoever told you this?"

"I don't know," said Alice, simply. "I seem always to have known it. Perhaps dad told me something himself; perhaps I picked it up from the servants. Mamma was dead, so I was the only representative of the Vernons, that was one reason, I suppose, for Sir Richard had promised his father to 'do something,' and perhaps he thought letting me marry his heir and share the property was the best thing he could do."

"If only you had been a boy," sighed her aunt.

"Why then I should have been Sir Somebody Ainslie, and a very rich man; but, you see, the fates were against me, and I am just a poor orphan girl."

"Do you remember Captain Trafford?"

"I—I think so. He was a rough-looking boy with a shock of curly hair. He was twenty, and I was eleven, when he came to Ainslie Grange to ratify the agreement. Sir Richard was there too. I liked him better than his son. He seemed so sorry for me because I couldn't inherit the Grange. I remember he told Jim I had lost one fortune through being a girl, and it would be cruelly unjust if he robbed me of another. Jim just nodded (he had a shaggy head like a Newfoundland dog's) and muttered 'All right,' and then they made us shake hands, and it was all that over."

"And you have never seen him since?"

"I saw him a year afterwards, when dad died. Sir Richard and Jim came to the funeral. I think he said he was sorry for me, but I can't remember. Sir Richard wanted to take me home with him, but the will said I was to go to Aunt Dorothy, so my things were packed up, and my nurse brought me to you in Devonshire, and, soon after, we heard Jim had gone to India."

Mrs. Ward looked very thoughtful. She had settled in a quiet Kentish town not very long after Alice came to her.

Sir Richard wrote once a year, always asking for news of Miss Ainslie, but he never invited the girl to go and stay with him.

Mrs. Ward was a practical woman, though a very affectionate one. That to marry Jim, and become in time Lady Trafford, mistress of Castle Vernon and a princely fortune, was a grand match for her darling, she saw perfectly. As the grandchild of the last Lord Vernon, there seemed a kind of retributive justice in the arrangement; but, on the other hand, the widow thought Captain Trafford rather a laggard in love, and did not at all approve of the lack of fervour in his wooing.

"I am twenty years old," remarked Miss

Ainslie, simply, "and I have been engaged nearly half my life. Don't you think, Aunt Dorothy, I must be remarkable?"

"My dear, don't jest; love and marriage are far too serious things to be laughed at!"

"But I wasn't laughing,' protested Alice; "and I don't think aunt, there is much love in the matter. I never cared about Jem, he was such a great rough boy. Of the two I liked Sir Richard much better."

Mrs. Ward sighed.

"I am so inexperienced," she said, frankly. "You see, Alice, I had no girls of my own, and I don't know what is customary."

"I don't think," suggested her niece, quietly, "there can be anything 'customary' in the matter, for I hope few girls have a fate like mine!"

"Shall I write to Sir Richard, and tell him you are grown up?"

"Aunt Dorothy! you make my hair stand on end at the bare idea. Why, it would be like asking Sir Richard to order his son to come home and marry me!"

"But, my dear, he may have forgotten the flight of time."

"Jim hasn't forgotten," said Alice, severely; "he must remember his own age, and I am just nine years younger!"

"Goodness! Then Captain Trafford must be twenty-nine?"

"He goes with the year," remarked Alice, "he will be thirty on New Year's Day!"

They were talking in the month of October, 1889. Aunt Dorothy's handsome, well-built house looked particularly cheerful in winter.

She was a lady who studied comfort. The blazing fire, the rich, warm curtains, even the bright ruby dress of her pretty niece seemed peculiarly inviting when the air was so keenly frosty, and the sky so grey and lowering.

Alice Ainslie was remarkably pretty, and though the fact of her engagement made Mrs. Ward keep her as much as possible in the background, yet she could not be treated quite like a child, and there were one or two men already very envious of the absent *fiancé* whom no one knew.

Alice was not in the least like the usual idea of a poorly-provided-for orphan. The first ten years of her life had been spent in luxury, for the Ainslies were a wealthy race.

Though title and fortune went to a distant male heir, Mrs. Ward was rich enough to make the child feel very little difference in her new home.

Alice was everyone's first thought and chief consideration; had she not possessed one of the sweetest tempers ever known, she would certainly have been spoilt.

As it was, she had grown up a frank, unaffected girl, with the utter fearlessness of one who was used to nothing but kindness. She was not in the least sentimental; at any rate, she thought not, which came to much the same thing.

Mrs. Ward looked at her niece rather anxiously as Alice sat on the thick fur rug nursing a Persian kitten.

As she said herself, the aunt was not experienced in the ways of girls; but this much she did know, she could not keep her pet much longer in the background.

Last Christmas a rather serious illness had made her a prisoner indoors all through the winter months. The year before she had been in deep mourning, and prior to that she had refused all invitations, on the ground that Alice was not "out."

But at twenty she could not decline to let her darling mix in such gaieties as were to be had.

Christmas was a very festive time at Kingsleigh, and Alice would certainly have the chance of two or three balls, not to mention half-a-dozen carpet dances, and numerous social evenings.

What in the world was to be done? She might remind every hostess of Miss Ainslie's engagement just as a precautionary act; but it seemed to her to do so was just a little humiliating.

She was so proud of Alice she did not like to confess the girl's *fiancé* had not seen her for eight years.

Miss Ainslie herself guessed something of what was passing in her aunt's mind, for, suddenly putting down the kitten, she crossed to Mrs. Ward's side and kissed her.

"Don't worry," she said, coaxingly.

"My dear child."

"You are puckering up your forehead into all kinds of wrinkles," declared Alice, winkedly. "I believe you are making yourself quite miserable because you think Jim slights me——"

"I am naturally anxious," began Mrs. Ward, but Alice interrupted her.

"Please don't be," she said, cheerfully. "I shall be twenty-one next summer, and then I mean to break off the engagement!"

"Alice!"

Alice nodded her little head triumphantly.

"I can't do anything now," she said, with a little sigh, "because Jim might fancy it was out of pique, or because I was vexed at his indifference; but the moment I am of age I shall write and give Captain Trafford his freedom!"

"And then——"

"Well," said Alice slowly, "you and I will be very happy together, and forget all about weddings and engagements; and perhaps some day we may meet Sir Richard Trafford, and if Jim is comfortably married we might be very friendly. I always liked Sir Richard."

She was very pretty, this dainty girl whose fate was, as she expressed it, "remarkable." Alice Ainslie did not look in the least a *fiancée* to be neglected. She was small and slight in figure, she had masses of soft brown hair with just a glint of gold on it in the sunshine; her eyes were large, dark blue, their depths almost as dark as purple pansies. She had the clear fresh complexion youth and good health alone can give, while in contrast to her fair hair and delicate creamy skin, her eyebrows and lashes were almost black, which gave a strange, piquant charm to the sweet face.

She had lived with Mrs. Ward for eight years, during which that lady had provided for her every want, leaving the interest of Alice's little fortune to accumulate, so that the principal was quite half as much again as it had been at the time of her father's death. Mrs. Ward never denied her favourite anything, her idea being it was better for the child to enjoy the comforts money buys, than to save up for a future when she would probably be a rich man's wife.

Alice wore a charming dress of ruby cashmere trimmed with fur; a gold watch and chain; a large gold solitaire fastened her collar, and smaller ones adorned her cuffs. Her pretty hands were quite bare, save that on the engagement finger she wore a hoop of diamonds which Sir Richard Trafford had purchased for his son's betrothal ring. This gem had been the source of great anxiety to good Aunt Dorothy. It was only within the last year that she had considered Alice old enough to wear it, and even now the careless way in which the young lady treated it was a continual worry to her guardian.

"Lady Trafford is dead, I think," said Mrs. Ward, who seemed to take a mournful pleasure in discussing the topic of Alice's engagement.

"She died when Jim was a baby," replied Miss Ainslie. "There are ever so many girls; at least," naively, "I suppose they wouldn't be girls exactly by now, since Jim is nearly thirty, and he is the youngest of the family."

"And they live at Castle Vernon?"

"Where mother and all the dead and gone Vernons were born," retorted Alice. "It does seem a shame, but I believe they proved their claim to it."

"I suppose if Sir Richard was dead we should hear."

"O! course we should," said Alice, cheerfully. "And why should he die, dear old man? he can't be much over seventy even now."

"I was thinking," and Mrs. Ward paused as though she felt her remark would be unwelcome, "you may not have noticed it, my dear, but Sir Richard usually writes so very punctually on the first of October."

"So he does—and this is the tenth. Never mind, aunty; perhaps he went pheasant-shooting instead."

But though she gave no sign of annoyance, Miss Ainslie was really far more annoyed than her aunt dreamed of. Alice had not the slightest desire to be married, she was very happy as she was, and she did not entertain at all a flattering remembrance of the rough boy with a head like a Newfoundland dog's; but all the same, she was proud, and did not like to be slighted with impunity. If Captain Trafford was tired of the engagement let it be broken off, and she should be rather relieved than otherwise, but she was in no mood to play Juliet to such a very faithless Romeo.

Mrs. Ward did not go out that afternoon, but Alice drove her pretty ponies into Bromley, the nearest market town, and stopped at the post office where she obtained a great deal of useful information, namely, that the mail for India left London every Friday, and letters took about eighteen days in transit via Brindisi, but it was advisable to allow a little longer time in making calculations for any inland place.

"Which means," reflected Alice, "that I might get an answer in six weeks, but that it would be more prudent not to expect one under seven. This is Wednesday, so if I write to-morrow I shall be in ample time. I shall not say a word to Aunt Dorothy; she might wish to assist in the composition of my letter, and though it won't be precisely a love-letter, I think I would rather write it alone."

No, it was not a love letter. Alice Ainslie utterly forgot, as she sat down to her self-appointed task, that James Trafford like herself, had been more a passive agent than an active partner in the contract she wished to break. Only eleven years old at the time, she could not understand that Jim had yielded to his father's wishes only because the latter declared it was a point of honour, and that the "rough boy" had frankly said he would far rather restore the Vernon property to Miss Ainslie than barter away his liberty. She did not know that her father had made it a special stipulation that she and her betrothed should not grow up on terms of friendly intimacy, because he feared in that case her feeling for Jim would only be a sisterly affection, and she could not possibly guess that it had been settled between Sir Richard and his friend that she should not be married until she was turned twenty, and that Jim should not renew his acquaintance with her until she was within six months of that age. Her girlish vanity was disappointed by Jim's neglect. Her old childish love for Sir Richard was chilled by his stiff, formal letters, or she would never have indited the extraordinary epistle which was the young Captain's first letter from his *fiancée*.

"Dear Sir,—It is a very long time since I saw you, and I am a great deal older and wiser than when we agreed to that foolish arrangement at Ainslie Grange. I have not the slightest wish to marry you, and I am quite sure you can find someone much better suited to you than I am. I don't believe in love and marriage, and all that kind of sentimental rubbish.

"I have received a good education, and my aunt says I am a very practical young woman. I am very tired of England and the quiet country place where we live. I want to go about and see the world, but my aunt declares you would not like it, and that she must consider your wishes.

"I shall esteem it a favour, therefore, if you will kindly acknowledge this letter, and resign all pretensions to meddle in my concerns. I offer you your freedom, and I request my own. I am quite sure we should not get on together, as I am quite an inde-

pendent woman, and wish to devote myself to the cause believing in these rights, and I have the courage of my opinions.

"You need not think yourself bound to offer me any part of the Vernon property as a sort of compensation, for I have enough to live on, and I am not at all extravagant.

"Trusting you will give this letter your earliest attention,—I am, sir, your obedient servant, "ALICE MARY AINSLIE."

"That will do beautifully," reflected the girl as she fastened the letter and directed it—Sir Richard's last communication had mentioned where his son was stationed. "I am sure he won't want to have anything to say to me after that. I have said quite enough to make him think me horrible. Now he will get my letter in three weeks, and I think I ought to have an answer by the 26th of November! It was ridiculous going on as we were, and far better to have an understanding. I wonder what he will think when he reads it? Probably that I am a most objectionable young woman, and he is remarkably fortunate to be rid of me."

CHAPTER II.

CASTLE VERNON was a beautiful estate in Yorkshire, not twenty miles from Ainslie Grange, and a very warm friendship existed between Sir Richard Trafford and Sir Thomas Ainslie, though the latter was many years the younger of the two, being in fact not much over forty, while Sir Richard had passed his allotted three score and ten.

The famous law suit of Trafford *v.* Vernon had been fought honourably on both sides. Everything hinged on a question of entail: whether a dead and gone Lord Vernon had had the power to disinherit his daughter and only child, who had married the father of Sir Edmund Trafford, the plaintiff in the celebrated case.

It almost ruined Lord Vernon. Some ill-advised speculations completed his overthrow, and he died well-nigh penniless, his only consolation being that his only child was engaged to the master of Ainslie Grange.

That was more than twenty years ago. Sir Richard ruled now in his father's place, and Sir Thomas Ainslie, a distant cousin of the late baronet, was his close friend, while pleasant, kind-hearted Lady Ainslie was the intimate associate of the Miss Trafferds, three of whom still lingered in the paternal nest.

"I have been thinking," she said to Mabel, the chatelaine of Castle Vernon, "I should like to ask Alice Ainslie here for Christmas."

Miss Trafford started. She was quite aware of her brother's tacit engagement, and heartily disapproved of it.

She judged the unknown Alice with the peculiarly harsh criticism of thirty-nine, and was not at all disposed to see her at the Grange, feted and made much of.

"I wouldn't if I were you," she said, gravely. "You see, Jim will be home for Christmas and it might make things so uncomfortable."

"My dear girl," said Mabel Ainslie, laughing, "I am very fond of Jim, but I utterly deny his right to choose my guest. He has been engaged to my little cousin for nine years, and, it seems to me, directly he comes to England he ought to see her. He can't expect the child to 'wait' for him all the best years of her life. The engagement ought to be fulfilled or broken off; for either course he needs to see Alice, and I think myself they would meet far more comfortably here than at Castle Vernon."

"I certainly shall not invite Miss Ainslie to Castle Vernon," said Mabel, sharply. "I don't at all approve of the connection; with Jim's prospects, he ought to marry someone far different to a penniless orphan."

"I don't think Jem need complain," said Lady Ainslie, calmly; "of course Sir Thomas will give his kinswoman a handsome portion, and—and some day she will be mistress here."

Miss Trafford stared.

"I thought the property was entailed."

"So it is. A hundred years ago a certain Sir Gerald Ainslie entailed it on the heirs male of his only son, George, thus cutting off all collateral branches. George Ainslie had two sons. The elder John was the great grandfather of Alice Ainslie, while my husband is the grandson of the younger. The Ainslies don't seem to have been a prolific race. Sir Gerald's son George had two children, but none of their descendants had more than one. Alice Ainslie is the last representative of the elder son, and my husband of the younger, so that——"

"Please don't," said Mabel Trafford, her tone this time full of real sympathy, for she was really fond of Mabel and knew that the three little graves in Ainslie churchyard were an ever-present grief to her, "Please don't! I see what you mean. There being no male Ainslie some day Alice must be Sir Thomas's heir. I wonder you don't hate her for standing in your children's place."

"It is not her fault," said Mabel, half-dreamily, "and my little ones are beyond the need of earthly homes. I have always felt a strong interest in Alice Ainslie."

"And I never have."

"When I came here first and saw all she had lost through being a girl, I felt I should have liked to have her here and bring her up with our children; but my husband said she was adopted by her aunt, Sir Hugh's half-sister, and that, Mrs. Ward being childless, it would be cruel to take Alice away from her."

"Papa writes to Mrs. Ward once a year. He wanted to ask her and Alice to the Castle, but, of course, I wouldn't hear of it."

Lady Ainslie opened her eyes.

"Don't you care at all for your brother's happiness, Mabel?"

"So much that I want to see him freed from this foolish entanglement."

"You think Jim might do better than wed the heiress of Ainslie?"

"I hope she won't be the heiress of Ainslie," said Mabel, bluntly, "and I think a man should choose his wife for himself."

"When does Jem come home?"

"The beginning of December. Minnie and the children are coming to us for the Christmas on purpose to see him. Minnie was always his favourite sister."

"Well, I won't promise you not to ask Alice," said Lady Ainslie, gravely, "for I think it would be a very good opportunity for them to meet. I shall see what Sir Thomas says."

Sir Thomas's decision was prompt.

"My dear," he said kindly, "remember she is just the age of our Barbara. Could you bear it?"

"She has no mother, Tom, and I feel I should like to know her."

"Then ask her by all means," said Sir Thomas, warmly. "I have always felt an interest in Hugh's orphan girl, and though I have a warm regard for old Trafford, I do think he's gone just the way to make her and his son wretched."

"Jim's a fine fellow," said Lady Ainslie, who had seen a great deal of him in the first year of her residence at the Grange before he went out to India."

"Yes, but a trifle hard. He would be a devoted husband if he married for love, but I rather doubt his making a girl happy whom he was coerced into wedding."

"I think Mabel is hard on her."

"Minnie won't be," returned Tom, cheerfully. "Depend upon it, Alice Anslie will find at least one friend in her *fiancé's* family. Minnie will make a pet of her, and, as she is Jim's favourite sister, it is a good thing."

Meanwhile at Kingsleigh Alice Ainslie was awaiting, with what patience she could muster, Captain Trafford's answer to her letter. It cost her a great deal to keep her secret from her aunt, for events happened which made the Traffords and Alice's engagement Mrs. Ward's favourite theme of conversation, and the girl was enormously tempted to confess that probably by this time Jim was rejoicing at his release.

Lady Ainslie wrote about the middle of November, both to Mrs. Ward and Alice. She did not touch upon the question of the girl's future inheritance, but she said both Sir Thomas and herself were anxious to make acquaintance with their young kinswoman. The Grange was within easy distance of Castle Vernon, and if Alice became her guest it would be a favourable opportunity for her making acquaintance with her future relations, as her husband and herself were very intimate with the Traffords. In conclusion the kind-hearted woman begged for Alice on a long visit, and while warmly inviting Mrs. Ward to accompany her niece, she yet promised to take every care of Alice if she came to Yorkshire alone.

"You must go, dear," was Mrs. Ward's decision. "It would be graceless to refuse."

"I should like to see the Grange again," said Alice, dreamily, "and cousin Kate writes as though she would be kind."

"And it would be such an advantage to you, dear, to make the Traffords' acquaintance."

"If the Traffords want me they can invite me," said Alice, wrathfully. "I can assure you I am not anxious to see them. I hope Cousin Kate won't make me go there every day."

And so it came about that Lady Ainslie's invitation was accepted; but Alice, who had a strange aversion to going to Yorkshire before she had received an answer from Jim Trafford, insisted that the date of her visit should be left an open question.

Miss Ainslie was still in the agonies of suspense. She had begun to count the days, and almost the hours, which must elapse before she heard from Captain Trafford.

She was almost weary of speculating what he would say to her letter, when an event happened which quite changed the current of her thoughts.

Nelly Fortescue, an old friend whom she had known ever since she came to live with her aunt, arrived at Foxgrove Lodge on a visit, and Alice, who was genuinely kind-hearted, was struck with pity at the girl's thin face and hectic cheeks.

Nelly was an orphan like herself, but she had no kind, indulgent aunt to fill her parents' place.

When her father died some friends found her a situation as nursery governess, and there she had been for two years without a holiday, until, her strength breaking down, she was sent away as "not up to her duties," and but for Mrs. Ward's kindly hospitality, there would have been nothing before her but the convalescent home, for which her late employer was generous (?) enough to offer her a ticket.

"I think Mrs. Fuller ought to be tried for manslaughter!" said Alice, angrily, to her aunt. "She has nearly killed poor Nelly!"

"I want Nelly to stay with us six months; but she has set her heart on leaving on the first of December."

"Whatever for?"

"Why, it seems a friend of her late employer has offered to engage her as a kind of companion-governess, but she cannot wait for her after that date. I have told Nelly a month's longer rest might set her up for life, but I cannot get her to listen to me. She says she knows Mrs. Macgregor would be kind to her."

Nelly said as much herself to Alice.

"I know I am not strong enough, but I can't ask her to wait. She is so kind and good, I would rather have her situation than a nobleman's; but I can't expect her to keep it open for me."

"Why not?"

"Because she is going into the country on the first of December to stay at her father's,

and she can't go there with the children unless she has a governess."

"Let her get someone just for a month."

Nelly shook her head.

"The time's so short, and she might not find anyone willing to put themselves out of the way just for a month; besides—Alice, I hope I'm not getting jealous—if she met someone very nice, perhaps she might like her better than me, and not want me at all!"

"Look here, Nell," said Alice Ainslie, with the determined air of one used to her own way. "You are not going to kill yourself for any Mrs. Macgregor on earth. If there is no other way of making you stay here quietly to rest, why I'll go to Mrs. Macgregor myself!"

"You!"

"Well, I flatter myself I know enough to teach children of eight and nine," said Alice, mischievously, "and I am not at all a bad companion. Then, as Aunt Dorothy certainly couldn't spare me for long, you might be quite sure I wouldn't steal your situation permanently."

"It is just like you to think of it; but Mrs. Ward would never consent; and, Alice—I don't quite like to tell you—Mrs. Macgregor is Sir Richard Trafford's daughter, and I was to join her at Castle Vernon!"

'Well," said Alice, with unconquerable calm, "what does that matter. I have never set eyes on Sir Richard's daughter, and he wouldn't recognise me after nine years. Of course I couldn't call myself Ainslie, but except for that I see no difficulty."

"But Mrs. Ward will; and, Alice, Captain Trafford is coming home, and it wouldn't be—nice for you."

Alice went straight to her aunt and detailed her scheme. Mrs. Ward's objections were quite as strong as Nelly had expected.

"My dear child, it can't be. Captain Trafford would have every right to be displeased!"

"Bother Captain Trafford!"

"Alice!"

"Well, I can't help it," groaned Miss Ainslie, "for the last nine years his name has been a perpetual bugbear to me!"

"If it had been any other family," said Mrs. Ward, "for Nelly's sake I might have consented."

"Marriage is a very serious thing," began Alice, gravely. "It is very rash to take a husband of whom you know nothing."

Mrs. Ward fell into the trap at once.

"Very. That is why I am so thankful for Lady Ainslie's invitation. It will give you every chance of becoming better acquainted with Captain Trafford."

"In his father's house I should see him every day," rejoined Alice, artfully. "I could judge of his temper and disposition thoroughly by his behaviour to his little nieces' governess."

"My dear, it would involve you in endless difficulties. How could you go on to Ainslie Grange after you had met Lady Ainslie as a governess?"

"I shouldn't mind. If Cousin Kate was nice, I should tell her everything, and why I did it."

The doctor played unconsciously into Alice's hands when he came to see Nelly the next day; he told Mrs. Ward plainly the girl was consumptive, and that to go to Yorkshire in the winter would shorten her life.

"If she stays with you till after Christmas, and her health improves, as I expect, there is no reason why she should not join Mrs. Macgregor at Hastings, and enter on her duties; but to begin to work now, in her weak state, and to spend December and January in the bleakest part of Yorkshire, is just suicide."

"You see," said Alice, gravely, to Mrs. Ward, when they discussed the matter, "to live at Hastings would be such a boon to Nelly, and Mrs. Macgregor lives there all the year round. If only this unlucky visit to Castle Vernon could be got off, it would be an ideal situation for her."

"I will never hear of your taking her place," said Mrs. Ward, with the vehemence of a warrior who feels the ground slipping under his feet.

"Then Nelly will go herself, and shorten her life. Aunt Dorothy, can't you trust me to treat the Traffords with becoming courtesy? Don't you think I should be good to the children?"

"I call it a mad scheme."

"But you will give in? You wouldn't like by-and-by to feel that we had helped to shorten Nelly's life."

"My dear child," cried Aunt Dorothy, fairly conquered, "have your own way, only don't blame me if harm comes of it. And, Alice dear, it troubles me to think of your spending your Christmas shut up in a nursery, you who have always had so much liberty."

"A little work will be good for me," cried Alice. "You dear old aunty, I thought you wouldn't stand out. Now I am going to tell Nelly she had better write to Mrs. Macgregor to-day, and date the letter from Dr. Percy's, then Jim's sister won't think her governess is staying near his *fiancée*; and I shall write to Cousin Kate, and ask her to have me after Christmas instead of before."

Miss Ainslie was capable of much better letter-writing than the specimen she had sent to her lover.

She indited a very pretty note to Lady Ainslie, saying she was very sorry unforeseen circumstances prevented her coming to the Grange until the middle of January.

"Aunt Dorothy says you will think me very rude," concluded Alice, "but I have a very old friend staying with us who is ill, and it is for her sake I want to defer my visit to you. Please write and say I may come in January, for, indeed, I have been looking forward to seeing you and Sir Thomas very much, and I always love the Grange for my father's sake."

"I am sure she is a dear little thing," said Lady Ainslie to her husband as she read the note, "but I wish she could have come for Christmas. The sooner she and Jim get their first meeting over the better; but, of course, I shall tell her to come in January."

Mrs. Macgregor answered Nell Fortescue's letter by return of post. She said she was afraid her young friend had been seriously overworked at Mrs. Faller's, and she was sure she needed a longer rest. She was quite willing to receive Miss Ward as her substitute for a month, or even longer. The children were so young, that accomplishments did not matter; but Miss Fortescue must assure her of two things before she finally consented to the plan proposed: first, that Miss Ward was good-tempered; second, that she was a gentlewoman.

Presumably Nelly's reply was satisfactory, for Mrs. Macgregor wrote next to Alice herself. She gave her rather exhaustive directions for reaching Castle Vernon, and begged that she would arrive there on the first of December.

She promised payment at the rate of three guineas a month, and assured her governess elect she might depend upon being treated with every possible kindness and consideration.

"While, if I am satisfied with you, I will do my utmost to procure you another situation when Miss Fortescue is well enough to come to me," was the lady's promise, at which, Alice smiled a little, quietly wondering what Mrs. Macgregor would say could she only know her correspondent had once aspired to be her sister-in-law.

CHAPTER III.

"I WOULDN'T tell one of the others, Minnie, but you and I always confided our woes to each other. Just read this letter, and tell me what you think of it."

It was the day after Captain Trafford had landed in England, and he was spending the evening with Mrs. Macgregor at the hotel.

Minnie's husband was in the Navy, and during his compulsory absences she lived with her little ones at Hastings.

She had come up to sleep one night in London to break the long journey to Yorkshire. Perhaps she was glad that it gave her the chance of a long *tête à tête* with her favourite friend, her only brother.

"Jim," and she read poor Alice's effusion with flashing eyes, "she must be horrid."

"Only a trifle strong-minded. I was disgusted when I read the letter first, but, on reflection, I'm not sure but what the girl has something to complain of."

"What?"

"Well, you know, I suppose the engagement has been rather a nuisance to her. If she is a woman's rights champion, she must have been awfully handicapped by feeling she was bound some day to marry one of those objectionable animals—men."

"Jim, I don't think you ought to jest about it."

"The oddest part of it is, Minnie, that I was actually surprised."

"Anyone would be surprised," agreed Minnie.

"You see, she was such a child when I saw her last, and never hearing anything about her I never realised she was growing up. I had a letter from the governor by the same mail as hers, saying she was twenty turned, and it was time something was settled, and somehow I rather liked the idea (I hadn't read her letter then, you see), she was such a pretty little girl, and I was so fond of her in those old days!"

"My dear Jim," there was real sympathy in Minnie's voice now, "do you mean you have been in love with her all these years—you can't have seen her since she was a child?"

"I saw her at the funeral last. She looked such a mite in her black frock, and she had cried till her face was as white as marble, and her eyes seemed too big for it. I hardly spoke to her there, but I have never forgotten her. I think, Minnie, I have been more loyal to that child than many men are to the *fiancées* they have chosen of their own will. I never thought of a home of my own without thinking of Alice. I never gave a thought of love to any other woman. It always seemed to me that little girl was waiting for me!"

Minnie was crying heartily.

"I can't help it," she sobbed, "you are so disappointed; and if Alice was such a dear little girl, it must be all her aunt's fault that she has grown up so horrid."

"So strong-minded," corrected Jim.

"What answer have you sent to her letter?"

"I wrote and told her I would not take her dismissal until I had seen her. I offered to go to Foxgrove Lodge directly after Christmas; but she replies she will be at Ainslie Grange in January, and that if a meeting between us is absolutely necessary she would rather it took place there."

"Poor old Jim! So you've got the anticipation to worry you for weeks."

"It will be a disappointment to the governor."

"Terrible. He was so fond of Alice as a child. He has built so many hopes on your union. Shall you tell him?"

"There is no occasion to say anything except that Miss Ainslie has fixed January for our meeting. Perhaps when we see her we shall understand better. The disciples of women's rights carry their theories into dress, don't they?"

"Of course they do. They are simply hideous dowdies, at least most of them are, and they talk of the Cause (with a capital C), and scout men in general."

"Then perhaps we may trust to Miss Ainslie to disenchant Sir Richard," said Jim, hopefully. "And now, Minnie, tell me about your-

self. I suppose Macgregor is still at the Antipodes?"

"He will be home in March. The chicks and I are going to Castle Vernon to-morrow."

"To-morrow! I thought it was December."

"We all made a mistake in the almanac, I talked of the first of December, which, of course, is a Sunday, and Mabel took me to mean Saturday, while my governess construed it into Monday. However, I daresay she will be glad of another Sunday at home, and nurse and I can manage for two days."

"Surely the children are too young for lessons," said their uncle, laughing. "Don't make your daughters into prodigies, Minnie."

"There's no fear of that! Perhaps they might have gone a little longer without a governess, only, you see, since Charley's niece married, last August, I have been so dreadfully lonely. A sailor's wife needs some sort of companion if her children are young, just to keep her from anxious fears every time the wind blows high."

Jim understood.

"I see, you missed your niece so much that you are trying to replace her by a lady-companion, who shall combine that post with the one of governess to the little girls."

"Something like it. You know, Jim, father always wanted me to live at home; but I want a house of my own, so that Charley and I may have as much time together when he is on shore. Mabel and I never understood each other well, and since I have been a married woman I feel her yoke rather irksome."

"And the Macgregors, do you see much of them? Are they friendly?"

"Very. The old Squire is most anxious that Charley should retire and settle near them in Scotland; but my husband loves his profession, and it's ill luck waiting for dead men's shoes. Now, Jim, tell me plainly, what do you mean to do?"

"Do," repeated Captain Trafford, in a perplexed tone. "What do you mean, Minnie? I have a year's leave. I must stay in Yorkshire until I have seen Miss Ainslie, and broken the rupture of our engagement to my father. I will come and stay with you at Hastings later on, if you like."

"Of course I like. But that isn't what I meant. Shall you go back to India?"

"Why not?"

"Because you are father's only son, and he has set his heart on having you near him in his declining years. He is seventy-five, Jim, it can't be long before you are master of Castle Vernon. I think you might grant his wish."

Jim looked troubled.

"I always meant to leave the service when I married. I thought that Alice and I should settle somewhere near the Castle. I share your dislike of living in a home ruled by Mabel; but, of course, that is all at an end."

Mrs. Macgregor's reflection, as she bid her brother good-night, was that Alice Ainslie had a great deal to answer for.

Captain Trafford did not feel particularly cheerful when Monday came. He loved his father dearly, but his affections were chiefly centred on Sir Richard and Mrs. Macgregor. There was little real sympathy between him and the three unmarried sisters, who were all more or less on the shelf, since Mabel was verging on forty, and Jane and Maria only two and three years younger.

It came into the young soldier's head as he drove to King's cross, that few people in the world were so utterly lonely as himself. His father was proud of him, Minnie loved him, but he was absolutely necessary to no human creature. If only things had gone differently with his ill-starred engagement, Alice Ainslie would have had no cause for jealousy; popular alike with men and women, Jem admitted very few to his intimacy. If ever he loved, he would love with every fibre of his honest heart; and in spite of the years since they parted, he had never felt a warmer feeling for any woman than the affectionate regard he had for his old play-fellow.

He was rather late on reaching King's-cross. Then he never hurried himself and actually stayed a minute or two at the bookstall, to the despair of the porter who was carrying his rugs and bag. That worthy was powerless to choose a seat for the liberal looking gentleman, for the steam was up, the whistle had sounded; all he could do was to bundle Jim and his things after him into the nearest first-class carriage, with the reflection that as the train didn't stop till Grantham, the belated passenger would have to make the best of his surroundings for the next two hours.

They were off before Jim had well sat down. He unfastened his rugs, and spread one leisurely over his knees, he put his bag in the rack, cut his newspaper leisurely enough, and cursed the tardiness which had deprived him of a seat in a smoking carriage, before he troubled himself at all respecting his fellow passenger. He had seen as he entered, or rather was pushed into the carriage, that something feminine was in the far corner, but they had left all the suburban region behind and were steaming through the pretty country beyond Barnet before he even glanced in her direction, and then he saw that his companion was a young lady (so young in fact that he almost marvelled at her being trusted on a long journey by herself) whose face, though not absolutely sorrowful, had such a grave, thoughtful expression, such an earnest look that he would have staked a great deal her expedition was not one of pleasure.

The vibration of the train, now going at express speed, knocked a small parcel out of the rack and it fell almost on Jim's feet. He restored it to her with a smile, and a hope it was not injured by the accident; and as she thanked him in a clear musical voice, he had for the first time a good view of her face.

His first impression was correct. She looked a mere child, perhaps seventeen; she had masses of golden-brown hair, and a pair of dark pansy-blue eyes. She accepted his little service with simple courtesy, and neither giggled like an ill-bred school-girl, or frowned like a prude who resents a strange gentleman's civility as a deadly wrong. She was quite dignified in her simplicity, but not dis courteous. She had certainly—Jim decided—been used to receive respectful attentions, and he wondered more and more who she could be and where she was going.

Dress, which is never of much help to the masculine mind, in this instance afforded less clue than ever, for the girl was clothed from head to foot in a long tailor-made ulster of the darkest ruby cloth, and she wore a soft travelling cap to match. The attire was most becoming, but Jim, who had no experience of the prices of ladies' tailors, thought it a most unpretentious get up. The little grey muff and tiny leather hand-bag told no tales, and beyond that she was travelling first-class, there was nothing to denote her social status; and this last clue was no clue at all in an age when gentleman's families are content to ride third-class, and *nouveaux riches* indulge in Pullman's cars.

The paper was exhausted. They were still a good way off Grantham, when it began to snow, and Jim, who had been watching his companion attentively, saw that she was decidedly troubled by the change in the weather.

"Won't you let me lend you a rug?" he ventured to ask, as she drew up the collar of her ulster, and shivered just a little. "I am afraid we are in for a storm, and it will get colder and colder."

She accepted the rug with a graceful word of thanks. She seemed so used to being taken care of, that Jim wondered again and again what her friends had been thinking of to let her start on a long solitary journey on such a day.

"We shall be at Grantham in half an-hour, and I can get you a foot-warmer there if you are going farther."

"I am going ever so much farther," said the girl, with a frank smile, "and I shall be very glad of a foot-warmer. Aunty and I were in such a hurry at King's-cross that we never thought of getting one."

"There are sure to be some at Grantham. You do not look used to travelling alone."

"I have never been on a journey by myself in my life before," she confessed; "but," with a charming smile, "everyone has to make a beginning, I suppose."

"If I can be of any use to you, I hope you will let me know," he said, kindly. "I have been away from England a great many years, but I used to know this line very well. Are you going through to the North, or do you change anywhere?"

"I am going to a place called Clarenceton in Yorkshire, and I have to change at York and North Allerton."

Captain Trafford looked at her in surprise.

"Then we shall be fellow-travellers for good while longer. I, too, am going to Clarenceton."

He felt that she looked at him rather more scrutinizingly than she had done before, but she only said, gravely,—

"I am afraid it will be very tiresome if it snows. I have to go some miles beyond Clarenceton, and perhaps there will be no cabs."

Jim smiled.

"I don't think Clarenceton ever boasted cab; but pray don't be alarmed, your friends are sure to come and meet you. Yorkshire people are most hospitable, and would never let a guest arrive to find herself unwelcomed."

"But I am not a guest," said the girl, quietly. "I am going to Clarenceton as governess, so of course no one will trouble."

Captain Trafford looked at her in renewed surprise.

"Is it possible that you are Miss Ward, and that you are going to Castle Vernon?" he asked, eagerly.

"I am Mrs. Macgregor's governess. I——"

"I am her brother," interrupted Jim "Captain Trafford, at your service, Miss Ward, and I hope you will let me constitute myself your escort for the rest of this journey."

She grew first rosy red, then deadly pale She was prettier even than he had thought at first. Poor little thing! perhaps she had never been out into the world before, and was afraid of her employer.

"Have you seen my sister?" he asked, kindly. "No? Then I think you will like her very much. She is quite young, but she has a motherly way, and she is very fond of petting people, especially girls."

Miss Ward recovered her self-possession by an effort.

"I shall do my best to give Mrs. Macgregor satisfaction," she said, rather stiffly. "Little children generally take to me, so I hope your nieces will, Captain Trafford."

She spoke the name quite naturally. She was quite herself again now, and showed not the least confusion at discovering her companion was related to her employer.

Jim wished she had not had such very blue eyes. They reminded him somehow of Alice Ainslie's.

"Have you ever been in Yorkshire before, Miss Ward?"

"Not since I was a child. Yorkshire is only a tradition to me."

"It is the most beautiful county in the world!" cried Jim, enthusiastically. "I have been abroad eight years, and you can't think how often I have longed for a breath off the Yorkshire moors."

"I suppose we all get homesick at times," said Miss Ward, simply. "Word it as we will, that is what it comes to."

"I hope you do not speak from experience, Miss Ward?" he answered, kindly. "You are over-young to know what homesickness is."

"I don't," confessed Alice. "I have no home at all, properly speaking; only my aunt

is very good to me, and I have spent a great deal of time with her."

"No home?"

"Don't look so sorry for me, please," said the girl, quickly. "Everyone can't have a home, you know. There must be a few wanderers."

"I have been a wanderer for eight years," said Jim. "But then I always had home to look forward to at the end."

"And your sister, Mrs. Macgregor?"

"She is my favourite sister, but I have three unmarried ones besides, and my father is still living—an old man now. I expect these eight years have changed him."

"It's such a pity no one can stop just as we leave them," said the girl, wistfully. "Everything changes, and the friends we leave forget us."

"I don't think you are likely to be forgotten, Miss Ward," said Jim, with a wistful look into her dark blue eyes. "But you are right that things and people change—specially after eight years."

"Did you like India?"

"Yes, very much. I'm only home on a year's leave. If my father can spare me I shall go out again; but he is getting an old man, and I am his only son."

"I like old men," said Miss Ward, simply. "They are always so kind and fatherly."

Jim pulled himself up with an effort just as he had been on the point of telling Miss Ward everyone must be kind to her.

"I'm an idiot!" muttered the young man to himself. "I have never set eyes on her before, and though I am so interested in her that she seems just like an old friend, I can't expect her to feel like one. She must have been a little child when I went out to India. She doesn't look seventeen now. She must be a great contrast to my sometime *fiancée*. Alice Ainslie specially warns me she she is an independent woman, and has the courage of her opinions. This child looks made to depend on someone else's strength, and be petted and taken care of. Alice frankly declares she does not believe in love or sentimental rubbish. I can fancy little Miss Ward taking a great deal of pleasure in a man's honest devotion, poor little thing. I am very glad she is going to Minnie. She will appreciate her, but there must be a great many ladies who would think my little friend much too pretty for a governess."

He got the foot-warmer at Grantham. He persuaded Miss Ward to venture into the station dining room at York under his protection.

He found her a comfortable seat well out of the draught and cold, when they waited for the train at North Allerton, and her simple thanks, her pleasant conversation, and bright interest in all she saw, made her a very charming companion; but when they had entered on the last stage of their journey and were actually within two stations of Clarencetion, her mood changed. She ceased to talk cheerfully, she seemed hardly to hear what he said, and a strange, scared look had come into her beautiful eyes.

Jim pondered and pondered what she could be fretting about. At last he said, kindly,—

"I hope you have not been drawing any alarming fancy pictures of my sister, Miss Ward. I assure you she is kindness itself; and if—as I suspect—this is your first appearance as a governess, you couldn't begin with more tractable children than my little nieces."

A smile came to Miss Ward's face, but she made no other answer—once, twice, she essayed to speak, but the words would not come.

Jim looked at her with a growing concern on his honest face.

"It's hard to leave your friends, I know," he said, kindly; "but I hope you will be happy at Castle Vernon."

"I am sure I shall be happy," cried Miss Ward, with sudden confidence. "I am so fond of children, and they always take to me; but I feel a little anxious. I am not the governess your sister engaged, you know, but just a stopgap, because Miss Fortescue is ill. It will be so dreadful for her—Nelly, I mean—if Mrs. Macgregor won't keep me till she is well enough to come."

Jim opened his eyes.

"And when she is well enough, what shall you do then?"

"Mrs. Macgregor has promised that if I suit her she will try and get me a permanent situation; so," and the girl looked very much in earnest, "a great deal depends on it."

"And your aunt can spare you?"

"Oh, yes: she is not alone. She has other relations and lots of friends. I have been a great anxiety to her," concluded the girl, simply; "but she has been very kind."

The train stopped at Clarencetion. The snow still fell, and had already covered everything with a deep white carpet.

Jim felt Miss Ward tremble as he handed her out of the carriage.

"Sit there, please!" he said, leading her to the waiting-room, where there was a blazing fire, "while I see after the luggage and find out what is waiting for us. I hope it's the brougham, for you ought not to go in an open carriage on such a bitter night."

Left alone by the blazing fire, a strange change came to the girl's face.

"I wish I hadn't done it," thought Alice Ainslie, otherwise Mary Ward: "Jim was always so true, he will never forgive the deceit; and, oh! if I hadn't written him that odious letter. It would have been so much better to wait till he came home, and then give him his freedom in a proper natural way. We can't even be friends now!"

But perhaps Captain Trafford thought otherwise, for the care with which he took Miss Ward to the carriage, and heaped the soft rugs over her was friendly in the extreme. He was pitying the little governess intensely.

He was going home to be *fêted* and made much of; she would be the only stranger in the family group, and would, doubtless, feel home-sick and lonely.

It was Alice who broke the silence as they turned in at the lodge gates, and drove quickly to the Castle.

"Are you very pleased to be at home again, Captain Trafford—as pleased as you expected?"

He sighed.

"I am glad to see the old place again, but things are very different from what I expected. A hope has died out of my heart since I left Castle Vernon eight years ago, and my own disappointment will be shared by my father."

The friendly darkness hid Alice's crimson blush. She knew he was thinking of his engagement and the cruel unwordanly manner in which his *fiancée* had broken her troth. She blushed now whenever she thought of that letter.

Side by side they drove on up the long avenue, the girl's thoughts busy with what might have been. Had she so willed it she might have entered Castle Vernon almost in triumph as the bride of its heir; had things been different, it would have been a sister's welcome which she would have received from Mrs. Macgregor. Now she was going as a paid dependent to the home that might have been her own.

There was a perfect blaze of light as they came in sight of the house. Alice could see a group of people gathered in the hall.

"Please leave me here," she said, timidly, to Captain Trafford; "your father is watching for you, and no one is waiting for me. Please let me stay here with the luggage!"

Jim did just what she asked. He had a dim suspicion his sister Mabel would be prejudiced against Miss Ward if the poor girl entered the Castle at his side.

He went quickly up the terrace steps. Another moment he was wringing his father's hand; while Mrs. Macgregor (whose heart was the kindest in the world) remembered the governess, and went forward to meet the little figure who followed Jim at a respectful distance.

Minnie told her husband, afterwards, her first thought was there must have been some mistake; her second, that Miss Fortescue had sent her a child instead of a governess.

Then, when Alice came into the brightly lighted hall, and she could see the traces of tears on the beautiful face, her one idea was to make the little stranger feel at home, and screen her from Mabel's notice.

"Come upstairs and see the children," she said, kindly; "they are at tea, and I am sure you will be glad of some, too. How did you leave Miss Fortescue?"

"She seems better, but the doctor thinks she ought not to come so far north as this."

"She looked to me terribly delicate," said Minnie, as they went upstairs; "but I know that mine was not a hard situation, and I thought my little girls would be such a pleasant change for her after Mrs. Fuller's noisy brood."

"She is looking forward to it very much."

"Did you meet my brother at Clarencetion?"

"Captain Trafford got into the carriage where I was at King's Cross."

"Oh."

There was a faint shade of disapproval in that "oh," and Alice thought it best to explain.

"I believe he came too late to get a place in a smoking-carriage. The porter almost bundled him in, and before he could sit down even, the train was off."

"Just like Jim," said Mrs. Macgregor, in a very different tone. "He was always almost too late. See, Miss Ward, this is what we make the nursery."

The little girls were like their mother in their simple good nature.

Mrs. Macgregor decided Miss Ward must have tea before she attempted to take off her things. She sent nurse down for some substantial additions to the meal, and placed a low chair by the fire for the governess.

"Another day I hope you will dine with us, but I am sure you are too tired to-night to face a party of strangers besides my father and three sisters. Sir Thomas and Lady Ainslie are here to-night; they are neighbours of ours, and have come to welcome my brother home."

Nurse was an old-fashioned servant, who knew a lady when she saw one, and she waited on Alice with the kindliest respect, coming of her own accord to help her unpack when the two little girls had gone to dessert.

"And any little thing you need, Miss Ward, just tell me, and I'll see to it. This is a big house, but it's not so home like as our house at Hastings. Mrs. Macgregor is only a visitor, like yourself, and can't order things just as she would; but she wants you to be comfortable, miss."

"What time is breakfast, nurse?"

"Nine o'clock, Miss Ward, and you and the young ladies 'll be expected downstairs. You'll hear the gong; but I'll send the little girls to you five minutes beforehand."

The next morning Alice woke early, quite refreshed, and ready for any amount of excitement; but her heart rather sank at the prospect of meeting Sir Richard.

"I hope and trust he won't recognise me," she thought; "but Aunt Dorothy is always declaring I haven't altered a bit."

It was the first time she had ever dressed herself without the help of a maid; but she had been practising lately, and managed to erect the coronal of plaits on the pretty head without much difficulty.

She had had one or two tightly plain dresses made for her sojourn with Mrs. Macgregor; but, if she had only known it, she looked prettier than ever in the trim blue serge, and hopelessly unlike a depressed orthodox governess. She had brought her diamond ring (perhaps she hoped for a chance of restoring it to its owner), but for days past she had left

of wearing it, so there was no fear of that betraying her.

With a child on either side, she went downstairs as the gong sounded. It was a decided relief to find Mrs. Macgregor there before her, ready to introduce her to Sir Richard.

"This is my companion, papa, and the children's governess—Miss Ward."

"Welcome to the Castle, Miss Ward," replied the old man, kindly. "You look overyoung for this sort of thing. Why, you are not much more than a child yourself."

"Far too young to teach Daisy and Ethel anything useful," said a sharp voice near them. "Minnie, I really wonder at your folly."

Alice blushed crimson, but Mrs. Macgregor took her sister's attack quite cheerfully.

"I like young people, Mabel," she said, quietly, "and Miss Ward will get older every day."

Enter Captain Trefford. He came up to Alice with a bow, and kindly inquired as to whether she felt rested.

"Of course she does!" snapped Miss Trefford. "There's nothing tiring in travelling. You've nothing to do but sit still."

Alice decided, mentally, Mabel Trefford would be her bugbear while she remained at the Castle.

She found her eyes wandering often to Sir Richard's face when she thought herself unobserved. She could remember the old days when he had been a constant visitor at Ainslie Grange. She wanted to see if he was altered.

"Just the same," was the verdict as she listened to the kindly voice. "Just the same; but, oh! I hope he won't know me."

She little thought that a far worse danger threatened her at Castle Vernon than being recognised by Sir Richard as his old friend's child.

CHAPTER IV.

It was the middle of December. Alice Ainslie—alias Mary Ward, had been more than a fortnight at the Castle, and she regretted bitterly that she had ever come, for, alas! she had walked blindfold into a great trouble.

She had fallen in love with the very man to whom she had penned a heartless rejection. She believed she had spoilt every chance of happiness by her folly, for what a dreadful muddle she had made of her affairs.

Even if Jim loved her—and she hoped sometimes he did—how could he tell her so while he believed himself bound to Alice Ainslie? And even if he did tell her, how could she accept him? since it was equally impossible to confess the truth and own she was Alice Ainslie, writer of the letter which had so disgusted him, or to be married as Miss Ward, and lose her own identity for ever.

Captain Trefford was quite as miserable as his unknown *fiancée*, only, unlike her, he had made up his mind what course to take. He intended to wait until he saw Alice Ainslie at her cousin's, and then bravely tell her the truth that his heart had passed from his own keeping, and he could never offer her a husband's affection.

Lookers-on, who proverbially see most of the game, were in this case desperately blind, for no one at the Castle had the least suspicion of the comedy being acted under their eyes; and so the December days wore on.

Sir Richard was anxious about his son's long-projected marriage, and openly told Jim he should be glad when Alice Ainslie became his daughter-in-law.

The old man spoke so affectionately of the pretty child he remembered long ago, and seemed so anxious for her happiness, that Jim, partly in self-defence, partly to show how little Alice's happiness depended on him, told his father of the letter he had received from her in India, and his firm belief that she was as eager to be free as he himself.

"You must come to some understanding when you meet her at Lady Ainslie's in January," said Sir Richard, sadly. "I can't think what Mrs. Ward has been about to let her grow up with such horrible ideas. She was the sweetest child I ever knew."

They parted. Father and son understood each other thoroughly. Both knew, without words, that Jim desired his freedom; but that if Alice Ainslie repented of her extraordinary letter and wished to hold him to his engagement, he would be true to his word.

"What's the matter, Minnie?" asked Jim an hour later, seeing his sister in the great hall looking rather disconsolately at the fast-falling snow. "Surely the chicks are not out on such a bitter day as this!"

"Oh, no, they are safe in the nursery; but I am anxious about Miss Ward; she started directly after lunch to go to Glenavon," naming a small village about two miles off, which boasted a post-office and one or two humble shops. "Nurse says she had a letter in her hand; foolish child, she might just as well have waited for the post-bag."

Mrs. Macgregor could not guess that Miss Ward had a nervous dread of anyone seeing the address of her letters. Foxgrove Lodge, Kingsleigh, Kent, would have been a revelation to any of the family at Castle Vernon.

"I will go and meet her," he said, simply. "It is getting dark, and it is not fit for a girl to be out alone; besides, look at the snow. She might lose her way."

He started at once, waiting for neither thanks nor expostulation. The way to Glenavon was across the park, but in the snow anyone not familiar with the district might easily lose the track and wander for hours in the mazes of the white-mantled slopes.

He was quite right. It was full an hour before he found any traces of Miss Ward. Then it had grown quite dark, and only the friendly help of his lantern showed him the little figure concealed under the shelter of an old tree, as though for protection from the pitiless storm.

"Now, Miss Ward," cried Jim, speaking sharply just to hide the emotion he felt, "what is the meaning of this? Do you want to kill yourself, that you venture out in such weather as this?"

"It did not snow when I started, and I lost my way, or I should have been home ages ago."

"I daresay. What do you mean by standing still? It is enough to give you your death of cold!"

"I am so tired," there was almost a sob in the poor girl's voice, "so very tired, and I feel so miserable!"

Jim drew her hand through his arm, and half led, half carried her back to the footpath she had missed.

The danger she had been in only told him more plainly his own secret—he loved her. Of course Miss Ainslie would set him free, but what would this child say to him?

"I wish you would take better care of yourself," he said, crossly. "Minnie is scared nearly out of her wits about you."

"Mrs. Macgregor is very kind to care."

"Don't talk like that," said Jim, angrily. "You will persist in speaking of yourself as though you weren't worth troubling about and—I don't like it!"

Something in his voice stirred her heart to its very depths. She felt that he loved her; but, oh! how should she break down the barriers her own folly had raised between them. She could not say to him, "I am Alice Ainslie," because of that horrible letter she had sent to him in India. She could not let him speak kindly to her as "Miss Ward," because every word was a stab to her, knowing how she was deceiving him!

"To-morrow will be Christmas Eve," said Alice, trying hard to speak on indifferent subjects. "Do they keep Christmas in India, Captain Trefford?"

"I don't want to talk about India," said Jim. "I have something very serious to say to you. Mrs. Macgregor is going home directly after New Year's day, a week on Thursday. Shall you be with her at Hastings?"

"I don't know."

"Minnie was saying yesterday she had very bad accounts of Miss Fortescue's health, and that she thought you would perhaps agree to stay with her always."

"I can't do that."

"Why not?"

Alice could not answer, and he went on eagerly, pressing the hand he still held more closely.

"Will you promise to stay with my sister until I come to her. I cannot speak more plainly now, I may not; but surely you will promise me this much, not to vanish from my life as suddenly as you came into it. In a very little while I hope to come to Hastings. Promise me that I shall find you there?"

"I cannot promise."

"Why not?" he persisted.

What should she do—she loved him so, and there was a time when he had been hers and hers only. Oh! how mad she had been to bride with her happiness; and now, here was Jim waiting for her answer, and—what could she say?

"I do not think I shall go to Hastings." Her voice was very sad and heavy, but every word fell distinctly on his ear. "Captain Trefford, I had better not go. I ought never to have come here. Miss Fortescue is my dear friend; she was ill, and she wanted to keep your sister's situation open for her, and so I promised to come for a little while."

"And what was there wrong in that?"

"Everything, I am afraid," said the girl, simply; "for I know if I had told Mrs. Macgregor who I was, she would never have let me be her children's governess!"

Jim's heart seemed to stand still.

"Who are you?" he asked, harshly, just because he was so afraid of breaking down. "Surely you do not mean you have come here under a false name, and deceived us all wilfully?"

"I have done just that!" said Alice, gravely. "I am not Mary Ward at all. In my own true name, Captain Trefford, you would have shrunk from me in aversion; for——"

The sentence was never finished. She had meant to add "for I am Alice Ainslie;" but at that moment a gust of wind blew the umbrella out of Jim's hand. When he had recovered it they were at the foot of the terrace steps. He withdrew his hand, and said, coldly,—

"You cannot mistake your way now. I will not ask your reason for this cruel deception—I do not seek to know it—only there are others of my family who would have less forbearance. For your own sake I would advise you to leave the Castle directly after Christmas. Such an accomplished imagination as yours will have no difficulty in inventing some plausible excuse."

The girl turned her beautiful eyes upon him. They shone like amethysts in the darkness.

"Say one kind word to me," she pleaded. "I meant no harm, and I have been so happy here."

"Happy!" he cried, bitterly. "Happy! while you were doing your best to break an honest heart. I won't forgive you; I won't speak fair to you; while I have but one wish—that I may never see your beautiful false face again."

CHAPTER V.

It was Christmas Eve. The snow lay thick on the ground. The sky was a dull grey tint, almost giving promise of more snow yet to come. There was a strange want of Christmas merriment in the faces gathered round the breakfast table at Castle Vernon. Jim thought, as he made his tardy appearance. One glance told him the little governess was

not present, but he was not surprised. Mrs. Macgregor, alarmed at her white face, had sent her to bed the evening before, directly she returned from her weary pilgrimage to Glenavon, and had specially forbidden her to rise till after breakfast.

Sir Richard looked troubled as though he had not recovered from yesterday's conversation with his son. Mrs. Macgregor had an anxious air, for she fancied one of her little girls had taken cold. As for the three Miss Traffords it must be confessed they were wont to look rather sour: spinsters of thirty turned are apt to cultivate rather an acidulated expression.

There were to be no particular festivities at the Castle, except that Sir Thomas and Lady Ainslie were coming over to spend Christmas, and that to-morrow there would be a dance in the servants' hall to celebrate the heir's safe return from India.

Jim looked round the table and wondered if he would be expected to settle down at the Castle for the rest of his life. He knew it would well-nigh break his father's heart if he went abroad again for another term of service; but how could he bring himself to live in this quiet Yorkshire mansion, where he had suffered the cruellest sorrow of his life?

Breakfast was over. The "girls," as the Miss Traffords were still styled by courtesy, went about their usual vocations; Minnie took her children to the nursery. Sir Richard turned to his son.

"I kept this back, Jim. I did not want you to have it while your sisters were here—it is from Alice Ainslie."

Jim started. Had she changed her mind, or was this letter merely to confirm her previous one, and give him once again his freedom. He took it listlessly enough. What did Alice Ainslie's decision matter to him, since the other hope was shattered, and nothing in all the world would give him back his faith in his little love?

"Do open it," urged Sir Richard. "I want to know what Miss Ainslie says."

It was a very different letter from the one she had sent him in India, and Jim felt almost a friendly regard for the girl who expressed herself so frankly. But what did anything matter now?

"My dear Captain Trafford,—

"You may be surprised at hearing from me before our projected meeting at Ainslie Grange, but I have a confession to make to you, and I know I shall be ashamed to make it when I see you, so I preferred to send this letter. When I wrote to you in India I was very angry. My aunt was always talking about my engagement, and I had got the idea you thought I was bound to wait meekly, like a parcel in a cloak-room, till you 'called' for me, so I wrote and made myself out about as horrible as I could, hoping to disgust you.

"As a fact, I don't understand anything about 'Women's Rights,' and I hate girls who talk about the Cause. I believe I am just an ordinary English girl, neither particularly objectionable nor the reverse. Aunt Dorothy has spoilt me dreadfully, and she would be almost heartbroken if she knew about that terrible letter, so will you please try and forget all about it.

"But as we have not met for so many years, and as perhaps we shall not like each other, I would like best for us still to be free. When I see you at Ainslie Grange, perhaps we can be friends. You used to be very good to me when I was a child, and I would rather have you for my own chosen friend than for a lover against your will.

"I know I have been very foolish, but things were very trying when I wrote that horrible letter, so please forgive

"Alice Ainslie."

Jim started as he finished the penitent note. It was so simple, it had come so evidently from the girl's heart, that he felt touched. Perhaps they might be friends after all. He was just going to tell his father the tenor of the letter when Mrs. Macgregor came into the room with a white, scared face.

"Papa—Jim, something terrible has happened! Miss Ward has disappeared!"

"Nonsense, child!" said Sir Richard, promptly, for Jim was past speaking at all. "What makes you think so?"

"She got up very early, and nurse says she came in with her things on to kiss the children, but she never thought anything more than that Miss Ward was going for a walk. But she has taken a black bag with her, and her box is ready packed in her room."

Sir Richard's face grew very grave.

"Has she left no letter explaining her flight, Minnie? I can't believe that she would go off like this without a word or sign."

Nurse came in while her mistress was trying to answer. She carried in her hand a little note. It was very short and simple, only telling Mrs. Macgregor that Miss Ward had left her because she "thought it best."

"Thank you again and again for all your kindness," wrote the poor child. "But I know now I ought never to have come. My aunt warned me it was unwise, but I was so anxious to help Nelly Fortescue, and I wanted to come to Castle Vernon. Please forgive me, and think as kindly of me as you can."

"Miss Ward has gone home, nurse," said Minnie, feeling for the girl's own sake she must try and silence any gossip about her flight. "The friend in whose place she came to me is very ill, and she wanted to see her again."

"Indeed, ma'am, and I wish the young lady had only said the word and had the carriage to take her to Clarencoton. It's not fit for a long walk that she is, and she'll have a bitter journey, for it's the coldest day I ever knew."

"Nurse was very fond of her," said Minnie, as the woman disappeared. "It is strange how Miss Ward seemed to creep into one's heart. I can't understand her letter the least in the world, and yet I feel she can't have done anything wrong, and if she had only trusted me I would have tried to help her."

Jim was silent. He had received Miss Ward's note from his father, and the strangest fancy had seized him. The writing much resembled that in Alice Ainslie's penitent letter.

His sometime *fiancée* had been brought up by an aunt. His sister's governess acknowledged no near relation. Miss Ward had come from Bromley, which was the nearest town to Kingsleigh. The girl's strange reserve about herself, her unaccountable habit of always posting her own letters, would all be explained if she were indeed Miss Ainslie.

Even her own words that she "ought never to have come to Castle Vernon, and Mrs. Macgregor had she known her real name would never have engaged her as governess," even this confession, which at the time Jim imagined to refer to some shameful secret, would agree perfectly with his theory that she was Alice.

A certainty stole upon Jim that it was even so. The child *fiancée* to whom he had kept faith all these many years was the beautiful girl to whom he had lost his heart at first sight. If only he had been gentler with her yesterday she would have told him all; and now she was a lonely wanderer on this bitter December day, and his last words to her had been a prayer that he might never see her face again!

CHAPTER VI.

Alice Ainslie left Castle Vernon with no fixed idea but to escape another meeting with Captain Trafford.

She loved him dearly. She believed his whole heart was hers, and yet so troubled had been the course of their affection that she could see no break in the clouds.

She had sent the letter Jim received that morning to Kingsleigh, begging her aunt to post it.

She had not been quite hopeless then. She had hoped that letter would soften Jim's heart, and that when she met him in her own true character at Ainslie Grange sunshine might reign between them; but now, alas! this hope was over.

She had been far too excited and upset to study the time-table. She knew from chance conversation that the first train left Clarencoton at nine. She caught it with much difficulty, and then, to her dismay, found, at North Allerton, all the passengers had to alight as it went no farther, and there was not a train south for two hours.

"You're not due in London till five, miss," the civil porter told her; "and being Christmas time and such bad weather, you'll be late, I expect. Just sit down, miss, and I'll come and find you when the train's in."

She was shivering in every limb, poor child. She had forgotten her muff, and had brought no rug to protect her on the long journey. She pulled up the collar of her ulster, and waited patiently, sad and sick at heart.

What a contrast to Alice's last journey!

There was no one now to procure foot-warmers for her at the different stations. There was no one to lend her his rug, or beguile the tediousness of the way by pleasant talk.

At some of the places where they stopped Alice saw parties of happy-looking people carrying large parcels (evidently Christmas purchases), with cheerful faces, full of peace and goodwill.

She could hear their joyous greetings, their salutations of "Merry Christmas!" and a strange lump came in her throat, and the tears were very near her eyes.

The guard came to look after her at York; for guards are human, and the sight of the weary little face had aroused his pity.

He told her there was half-an-hour to wait, and asked her if she would not like some lunch; but Alice was afraid to leave the carriage. She swallowed a cup of tea and a sandwich brought her by her friend in need, and then she sat down to while away as best she might the four mortal hours that remained of the journey.

"We'll be an hour late to a certainty, miss!" the guard assured her; "the snow's that deep we can hardly get along, it's a bad day for travelling."

Evidently other people were of his opinion, for Alice saw one party leave the train and deliberately announce their intention of spending the night at York rather than venture farther, and instead of crowded platforms, hardly any passengers appeared at the stations where they stopped.

It grew dark, and the carriage lamp became useful in other places than tunnels.

Alice leant back in her corner, cramped and numb in every limb; and at last, worn out by fatigue and grief, she fell asleep.

When she awoke it was with the sensation that something had happened. The train was perfectly still, but they were not at a station.

Looking out, Alice could see nothing but darkness. She was conscious of a bruised, shaken feeling as though she had been knocked violently against the walls of the carriage.

She put down the window and then she could distinguish the welcome sound of voices. Evidently something had happened, but what? She was soon to know. The friendly guard flung open the door, a lamp in his hand.

"Don't be frightened, miss," he said, kindly, "but there's an accident. We were so much behind time that the driver put on steam, and, in the fog, he didn't see the signals was against him, and we ran into a goods train just inside the tunnel. I'm afraid you're a bit shaken, miss; but be thankful it's no worse. There's a deal of harm done to the front part of the train."

"And where are we?"

"About two miles from Dagley Bridge, a place a little north of Grantham. Sit where you are, miss, and I'll send someone to you soon. What's in front of us is no sight for you;" and strong man though he was, he shuddered at the thought.

Left alone, Alice leant back wearily. There was no anxiety or eagerness to know the worst at her heart, only a kind of restless feeling that it was a pity she had not died this Christmas Eve, and someone whose life was of value been spared. Would Captain Trafford hear of this accident? Would he forgive her now, and be just a little sorry for the harsh things he had said to her only yesterday? Perhaps——

She was aroused by the carriage door again opening; but this time it was no guard who entered with a lamp. She found her hands grasped suddenly in a warm, close pressure, and a man's voice cried reverently,—

"Thank Heaven!"

"Captain Trafford—Jim."

She only breathed his name. Then, overcome with all the terrors of that dreadful day, she fainted.

* * * * *

When Alice came to herself she was lying on a horse-hair sofa in a quaint, homely room, which was really the best parlour of the railway hotel at Dagley Bridge. A grave, elderly man was bending over her with an anxious face, and at a little distance stood Jim Trafford, with a look of agony on his kindly features.

"Ah!" said the doctor, as Alice slowly opened her eyes, "she will do now. I can leave her in your care while I go and look after the other sufferers; there are plenty of people needing me to-night, unfortunately."

Left alone in the pleasant glow of the bright wood fire, Alice Ainslie raised her pansy-blue eyes to her lover's face, for he was her lover in spite of all the cruel things he had said to her.

"Am I dying?"

"My darling, no," he cried, huskily, "not if there is mercy in Heaven. You fainted from the shock of the accident, and the fatigue of that dreadful journey."

"Were you in the train?"

"I came to look for you," he said, simply. "You surely didn't think I could rest, after your letter, without knowing what had become of you."

"But you were angry."

"I was very angry," confessed Jim; "but, oh! my darling, I have repented of my harshness bitterly since I lost you."

"You said you could never forgive me," said Alice, simply, "and that you prayed you might never see my face again."

"Did I?"

"Yes; and you nearly broke my heart."

"Then you cared too, dear—just a little?"

"I cared too much," said the girl, brokenly, "for you will never forgive me. All I told you yesterday is quite true: I am not Miss Ward."

For all answer, Jim opened his arms and strained the slight figure to his heart.

"Listen to me," he cried, passionately. "I don't care what your name is, my darling, I only know I love you with all my heart, and that I shall never have any happiness unless you are my wife."

"But—but Miss Ainslie?" asked the girl, with a strange smile.

"I have the strangest fancy, dear, about Alice Ainslie. Your writing is just like hers, and you, like her, have an Aunt Dorothy. From the moment I first saw you, you reminded me of someone. I never knew until this morning that it was of the little girl to whom I plighted my troth nine years ago."

"Ten," she corrected, and then blushed rosy red. Seeing what her speech implied, Jim smiled.

"Whether you are Alice Ainslie or little Miss Ward, darling, you are my heart's best treasure; but I own I should like to know my future wife's name. Are you——"

"I am Alice Ainslie," confessed his sweetheart. "Oh, Jim! what a muddle I have made of things."

Jim laughed; he really could not help it.

"All's well that ends well," he said, cheerfully. "We were engaged long ago to please other people. Now remember, young lady, you have promised to night, of your own free will, to be my wife, and I mean to marry you as soon as ever I can get a ring and a house. In proof of which, Alice, please—kiss me!"

She blushed crimson, and would have turned away, but Captain Trafford persisted.

"You owe it to me," he said, gravely. "Just think of what you have made me suffer."

And as their lips met, it seemed to both that the last cloud rolled away from their happiness.

"I have telegraphed to Mrs. Ward," said Jim, presently, "and I am sure she will be here to-morrow. The doctor is an awfully good fellow, and has promised to put me up for the night. The worthy landlady, Mrs. Hawkes, will keep you in order."

The next morning Alice felt as well and strong as ever, and nothing would content her but going to church with Jim; and so the old grey stone building welcomed two strangers to share in its Christmas worship, and there was a special mention in the general thanksgiving of two who desired to offer hearty thanks for great mercies vouchsafed to them.

Out into the December sunshine, lighting up the snow like diamonds, back to the Boar's Head, to find Mrs. Ward had arrived and was waiting to welcome them.

The Christmas bells rang out their joyous peal as Alice was clasped in her aunt's arms, and Jim wrung the dear old lady's hand as he received her sanction of the engagement made so long ago and ratified last night.

It was the strangest Christmas ever spent by Jim or Alice. Mrs. Hawkes treated them to her best plum-pudding, and roasted a turkey in their honour.

Aunt Dorothy presided at the feast with a sunny face, and Jim declared he had never been so happy at Castle Vernon as in this homely parlour.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Alice, as he spoke, "I had quite forgotten Sir Richard and Mrs. Macgregor. What will they say? Do you think they will ever forgive me, Jim?"

"I think," said Captain Trafford, "they love you already as little Miss Ward, and they will be delighted with you for turning out to be the wife they selected for me so long ago!"

And though people don't often behave as they are wished to do, Minnie and her father proved themselves exceptions to the rule, for they welcomed Alice Ainslie with warm affection, and assured her they always thought she was "just the wife for Jim," even in the old days when she was little Miss Ward.

Sir Thomas and Lady Ainslie were delighted; the Baronet gave Alice a handsome portion, and begged the young couple would consider the Grange as their chief home.

As the three spinster sisters still preside over Castle Vernon, Jim's pretty wife prefers the Grange, where she is petted and cherished as a daughter of the house; but Captain Trafford wanted a home of his own, so the young couple took a flat in Belgravia; though, with constant visits to Hastings and Kingsleigh, they can hardly be said to "live" there.

Nelly Fortescue saw the perfect happiness that had dawned for her favourite friend, before in early spring she faded into sleep.

Alice's baby-daughter is called Helen, and some day her childish fingers will be taught to strew flowers on the grave of her namesake in Kingsleigh churchyard.

So the romance ended happily, and, as Jim Trafford declared, he was quite contented so that he got his wife at last; but he never denied that his pretty Alice had made of their affairs—as she herself confessed—A TERRIBLE MUDDLE!

[THE END.]

ICE one inch and a half thick will support a man; four inches thick will support cavalry; five inches thick an 84 pound cannon; ten inches thick will support a multitude, and eighteen inches thick will support a railroad-train.

PHRENOLOGY is the term proposed for a study of the periods of blooming in flowers. In some parts of the world flowers appear with tolerable regularity—so much so that floral calendars have been based on the fact, and various flowers have been dedicated to saints' and church festival days because of blooming at special fixed times. The snowdrop, for instance, is known in Catholic countries as "Purification flower," from its blooming on the 4th of February, the festival of the Purification. Our St. John's wort is so named from its first flowers opening on St. John's day; and so of other flowers. There are, at times, a month of difference between one season and another, and sometimes a flower that blooms the earliest of all one year will be far behind others in another year.

"No animal that walks on four legs is as big a fool as a sheep," says a sheep-raiser. "We have to watch them every minute, and if vigilance is relaxed for an instant the entire flock is likely to practically commit suicide. In handling most animals some degree of self-help or intelligence can be relied on to aid the owner in saving their lives, but sheep seem to set deliberately to work to kill themselves. If caught in a storm on the plains they will drift before the wind and die of cold and exposure rather than move a hundred yards to windward to obtain shelter in their corral. To drive sheep against the wind is absolutely impossible. I once lost over 1000 head because I could not drive them to a corral not two hundred feet away. In the corral they are still more foolish. If a storm comes up they all move 'down wind' until stopped by the fence. Then begins the proceeding, so much dreaded by sheepmen, known as 'piling.' The sheep will climb over each other's backs until they are heaped up to ten feet high. Of course, all those at the bottom are smothered. Not one has sense enough to seek shelter under the lee of the fence, as a horse or a dog would do. Again, if a sheep gets into a quicksand, its fate teaches nothing to those that come immediately after, but the whole flock will follow its leader to destruction. No more exasperatingly stupid brute than a sheep walks."

THE TOMB OF EVE.—The Arabs claim that Eve's tomb is at Jiddah, the seaport of Mecca. The temple with a palm growing out of the solid stone roof—a curiosity which is of itself the wonder of the Orient—is supposed to mark the last resting-place of the first woman. According to Arabian tradition, Eve measured over two hundred feet in height, which strangely coincides with an account of our first parents written by a member of the French Academy of Sciences a few years ago, who also claimed a height of over two hundred feet for both of the tenants of the garden of Eden. Eve's tomb, which is in a graveyard surrounded with high white walls, which has not been opened for a single interment for over a thousand years, is the shrine of thousands of Ishmaelites, who make pilgrimages to the spot once every seven years. It is hemmed in on all sides by the tombs of departed sheiks and other worthies who had lived out their days in that region of scorching sun and burning sands. On each year, on June third, which is according to Arabian legends the anniversary of the death of Abel, the doors of the temple, which form a canopy over this supposed tomb of our first mother, remain open all night, in spite of the keeper's efforts to close them. Terrible cries of anguish are said to emit from them, as though the memory of the first known tragedy still haunted the remains which blind superstition believes to be deposited there.

FACETIÆ.

Everything is free when it is given away, except a bride.

While the Custom-House officer may be a seizer, he is not necessarily a Roman.

A man may be lantern-jawed and yet his face may never light up.

A man's sins are his creditors, and like them they are sure to find him out.

A dog will stick to his drunken master, but he will not drink whisky with him.

If you don't want to be robbed of your good name, do not have it painted on your umbrella.

Life is very short, but it doesn't seem so when a fellow is waiting for an overdue train at a country railway-station.

"Several important steps quickly taken," murmured the young man when the girl's father helped him down the front-door steps.

Smokeless powder means death to that old familiar expression. "He died with the smoking revolver clutched in his right hand."

A correspondent inquires: "How can I tell the age of a horse?" If you are anxious to sell the beast don't tell it at all.

Mildred: "What would you do if you had a voice like mine?" "I should be very careful not to overwork it."

The man who feels around in the dark for a door, and gets an arm on each side of it, occupies the time of a recording angel fully five minutes.

Robby: "How did the Sphinx get the credit for being so wise, papa?" Mr. Norris: "By keeping his mouth shut for three thousand years."

"Mizpah," she whispered, gayly, as she gave him a goodnight kiss. "Yes, of course I do," he blurted, "and I hope I'll miss pa every time I come here this winter."

Tramp (to farmer): "Does your dog like strangers?" Farmer (reassuringly): "Yes, come on; Towser never refused to eat one yet."

Somebody says—and nobody will doubt the truth of the statement—that it is a great deal better to say less than half what you think than to think only half what you say.

"You say the chicken soup isn't good? Why, I told the cook how to make it. Perhaps she didn't catch the idea." "No, I think it was the chicken she didn't catch."

A shrewd confectioner has taught his parrot to say "Pretty creature" to every lady who enters his shop, and his business is rapidly increasing.

"Oh, you are a very clever man." "So! then you have read my last book?" "Yes; but for all that I hold to the opinion I had before of you."

It's strange about a man and a pistol when he's got it pointed at you. You want the man to go off, but you don't want the pistol to.

Customer (in a restaurant): "See here, waiter, I've found a button in this salad." Waiter: "That is all right, sir; it is part of the dressing."

Reason Enough: "Daughter, a girl should never throw herself at a young man." "Why, mamma?" "Because girls are usually very inaccurate in their aim."

Mrs. Cumso: "George, dear, how can you tell the poison mushrooms from the harmless ones?" Cumso: "If you get poisoned it's the poison mushrooms."

Mr. Spooney (slipping ring on her finger): "Does it please you?" Miss Dash: "Yes, indeed; I'm never so happy as when I have a new engagement ring."

"There are three men of note," remarked Daughter Vickman to a friend. "Who are they?" "One is a reporter, another is a musician, and the third is a money lender."

Young Mother: "Horrors! Here's an account in the paper of a woman who sold her baby for ten cents." Young Father wearily): "Perhaps it was teething."

"What was Nero's greatest act of cruelty?" asked the teacher of the class in history. "Playing the fiddle," was the prompt response, and the teacher let it go at that.

Willing to do his best. "Johnny," said the pretty teacher, "what is a kiss?" "I can't exactly put it in words," returned the boy, "but if yer really wanter know, I can show yer."

She: "Did you hear about young Tompkyns?" He: "No. What?" She: "Took up a pistol and blew his brains out last night!" He: "Must have been a mighty good shot."

"It strikes me, my dear," said he, sarcastically, as the cries of the baby arose above the lullaby she was trying to sing to it, "that your voice is something of a Jonah—it is swallowed up by a wail."

Miss Enthusiasm: "What a noble fellow Mr. Blank, the poet, is! He just lives on his thoughts." Mr. Cynicus: "I don't doubt it. He looks as though he were accustomed to a pretty weak diet."

Critic (to artist): "Don't you think that modern table is out of place in an ancient picture?" Painter of the picture: "They had modern tables in them days as well as now."

"Ladies," said the old grey-headed teacher, "I am sorry to confess it, but I'd rather have five young men from the high school than one of you." "So would we, teacher," was the general reply.

Snodgrass: "I have all my clothes made by Kiszowski, a Polish tailor. Poles made the best tailors in the world." Snively: "Nonsense! It's a fact. The needle is true to the Pole, you know."

"It's unaccountable," he said, as he stood on the scales, after a walk on the beach. "I've gained five pounds in one hour!" "Have you emptied the sand out of your shoes?" she asked.

"Is that Harry Scribbler's writing, Kitty?" asked Sybil. "Yes, I'm engaged to him, you know," answered Kitty. "Of course, I was engaged to him last summer." "The dear boy! I wonder who he'll eventually marry?"

"Sticker is getting to be quite a society man. He tells me that he always makes it a point to be among the first nighters at the theatre." "Yes; Sticker owns a billboard. I understand."

"I broke my mother's heart when I tried to obey her." "How was that?" "Why, she told me not to marry for money, but to marry where money was. So I married a girl in the mint."

"Faith cure?" an old lady repeated recently, on being told that this was the latest form of intellectual revelry prevalent. "Well, I'm glad if they are getting their faith cured. I'm sure they need it."

Mrs. Oldboy: "Oh, you needn't talk, John. You were bound to have me. You can't say that I ever ran after you." Oldboy: "Very true, Maria; and the trap never runs after the mouse, but it gathers him in all the same."

Young Bride (pouting): "Here we have only been married two days, Clarence, and you're scolding me already!" Husband: "I know, my dear; but just think how long I have been waiting for the chance!"

"Dear Mr. Prettyman, do help me, I am making a collection of coins of the year of my birth," said a gushing lady of a certain age. "Alas! my dear madam," he replied, "those ancient coinages are getting so dreadfully rare."

Brown (at the hotel): This may be a first-class hotel, but I tell you that I can get a better meal in a third class restaurant any day in the week. Fogg: Seems more like home to you, eh? Well, well, there's something in that.

Printer's Wife: "Don't you think our boy needs a composing draught to quiet his restlessness?" Printer: "No; quite the contrary. He wants a composing stick, and he'll get it if he don't stop his monkey tricks at short notice!"

"Yes, the ceremony has been performed and John and Mary are one." "Indeed, which one?" "Well," replied the father of the bride, "from what I know of Mary's mother, I should say—but, ah! here she comes."

Prof. Wetthedust (a few years hence): "Good morning, Mr. Tiller. Anything in my line to-day. I have brought my balloons and explosives along." Mr. Tiller (American farmer): "Well, I dunno. What's the price of rain now?"

Too many buts (in the gloaming): Algernon Du Bois (fondly): Sweet girl: "I fain would call you mine, but—but——" Sweet girl (softly): "Well, dear?" A. Du. B. (hesitatingly): "I love you fondly, but——" S. G. (coly): "Alg, if you please, cease being a goat and talk like a man."

Author (of new play in far Western theatre): "Hark! What's that queer noise?" Western Manager: "Comes from the audience." "Eh, is that their style of applauding?" "No, it's the clicking of revolvers. I think they are getting ready to call for the author."

"When I marry I shall try to be sure of one thing, and that is, that I have a woman of sense." "You mean a woman of prudence and forethought, with fine perceptions and a knowledge of human nature?" "Yes, that's it, exactly." "But they are just the ones who never marry."

"You say your husband has tried to stop smoking, but can't?" "Yes." "Why doesn't he try an ocean voyage?" "What good would that do him?" "It might cure him. I have a friend who went on an ocean voyage, and the first day at sea he gave up everything."

Poetry, a waxed moustache, mystery, long hair, and a sweet tenor voice, will often make a woman feel as if there was only a sheet of tissue paper between Heaven and herself; but it is the man with a wart on his nose, and six figures in his bank balance who wins her and makes her happy ever afterward.

"It was Mr. Beaux-Yaux, wasn't it, who said that woman was created after man, and so she was only an afterthought, anyway?" asked Phyllis. "Yes," and Marjorie quietly smiled at her, and said that it was a universally admitted fact that second thoughts were the best.

Hunter: "I have travelled extensively, and have met fierce animals of every kind, and to my thinking the one most to be dreaded is the wild boar." Matter: "A dreadful creature, surely; but in my experience, one still more to be feared is the tame bore, who makes all his auditors wild."

"And so you're married, Bridget?" "Yes, mum." "And what does your husband do?" "An' shure, mum, he is a railroad dirrector." "A railroad director? That's a very important position. Are you quite sure it is that?" "An' faith an' doesn't he shtand all day at the railroad directing people to the cars?"

"How do you do, Miss Brownstone; they tell me you have moved out to the country—at what time do the trains run out to your place?" said he. "The trains go three minutes before I can get to the station, and at other times during the day," answered Miss Brownstone, wearily, who had not yet been broken in to catch trains.

Rev. Joseph Gravely (giving his views on the evils of card-playing during a pastoral call): "As I was saying, I am in doubt——" Parrot (interrupting eagerly): "When you are in doubt, play trumps!" And no member of that family has been able to account for the parrot's utterance to the satisfaction of the pastor.

SOCIETY.

The cost of making a £1,000 bank-note is less than a penny.

The Empress of Japan is quite musical and plays the koto.

There are about four yards of very close sewing in a lady's ten-button glove.

Purple is the most popular colour just at present, and looks best in a faced cloth.

Peers of England are free from arrest for debt, as being the Queen's hereditary counsellors.

The Emperor William has decided to construct two enormous dry docks at Kiel, at a cost of fifteen million marks.

Each year about £10 000 is expended in sprinkling the streets of London with sand, to prevent the horses slipping.

The Emperor William does not entrust the censorship of plays to any Lord Chamberlain. He uses the scissors himself and uses them freely.

The Duke and Duchess of Teck are now settled at White Lodge, Richmond Park, which will be their headquarters for the winter.

Emeralds are fast coming back into favour, and will perhaps be the most fashionable stones, with the exception of diamonds, of course, this winter.

In musical circles there is a growing opposition to the "encore fiend," who is always sure to make his appearance at concerts.

In Paris they have revived the old plan of cleaning the teeth with medicated silk; and little ivory reels, sometimes inlaid with gold and silver, are a familiar item of a lady's toilet-table.

The Queen will proceed to the Continent, according to present arrangements, at the end of March, and is to remain abroad for nearly six weeks. Her Majesty is to go first to either Florence or Aix les Bains for a stay of between three and four weeks, and will return home through Germany.

According to a writer in a New York paper, the days of slim, statuesque girls are nearly over, and the woman with a fair share of adipose deposit is to take her place in securing the attention, the admiration, and the affection of the sterner sex.

A finishing ornament for a drawing-room is supposed to be a bird in concord or contrast with the leading tones; so that any body on the hunt for a new parrot, macaw, or cockatoo is politely requested to be quite sure that its colouring will suit the carpet, chair, and table-covers near its stand.

The latest American invention is to carry pent-up gas in your pocket, in the shape of a patented torch, about six inches long, and made of a secret composition thoroughly permeated with gas. When lighted these sticks give off a large odourless flame, which burns for about half-an-hour.

A mother fortunate enough to possess a daughter should avoid two dangerous extremes in feminine adornment—she should neither dress her too old nor yet too young. Youth is always beautiful, and its delicacy, its harmony, and its colouring may easily be destroyed by an unbecoming gown or killed, as the artists term it, by too bright a colour.

The biggest ruby in the world is found in the Czar of Russia's crown, which has the distinction of being the finest ever worn by any sovereign. In shape it resembles a bishop's mitre, and on its crest is a cross composed of five superb diamonds, which support the "biggest" ruby. A foliated arch, composed of eleven magnificent diamonds, supports this cross, and on each side of the arch is a hoop of thirty-eight pearls, than which there is none handsomer in the world.

STATISTICS.

The heat of the globe increases one degree for every 80 feet in depth.

The average Great Northern express takes 1min. 15sec. to cover a mile.

Three hundred British steamers and sailing vessels are lost at sea yearly.

Over the whole of the various collieries throughout India, for the twelve months ending March 31, 1891, there were 17 fatal accidents, 56 serious accidents, and 182 minor casualties.

Four and a half millions were added to the amount standing to the credit of the depositors in the Savings Banks of the Post Office last year, the total on the 31st December, 1890, being £67 634 000. The amount of interest credited to depositors was £1 553 000. The total number of accounts open at the end of the year was 4 827 314, or 319 505 more than in 1889.

GEMS.

They are never alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts.

Looking for flowers without thorns is one of the best ways in the world of fooling your time away.

Children think not of what is past, nor what is to come, but enjoy the present time, which few of us do.

Men benefit the cause of honesty and sincerity of speech by accepting with gentleness, calmness, and courtesy all that may be brought forward in opposition to their views or in criticism of their conduct. Thus in many ways may what they esteem evil be turned into good; or rather the real truth that is in it may be gathered and developed, while the chaff will, by the same process, be blown away. "There is some soul of goodness in things evil would men observingly distill it out."

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

In boiling meat for soup use cold water to extract the juices; but if the meat is wanted for itself alone, put it into boiling water.

Delicate Cake.—Two cups of powdered sugar, three-quarters of a cup of butter, two and one-half cups of flour, three quarters of a cup of sweet milk, whites of six eggs, two teaspoonfuls of baking powder. Flavour with rose or vanilla. Bake in a round loaf one hour, and frost.

American Artificial Cider.—Place in a keg ten gallons of cold water, seven pounds brown sugar, quarter pound tartaric acid, the juice of of two pounds of apples boiled and strained, quarter ounce yeast. It keeps best without the yeast, and is fit for use in a day or two. I give this receipt, as for real cider there is no apples at present. It must be made when the apples are just ripe.

Beef Steak Pudding.—Six ounces flour, three ounces suet, pinch salt, one and half teaspoonful baking powder. Make all this into a paste with cold water. Take off a small bit and roll it round to make a lid. Then roll the remainder into a round scone. Grease the inside of a small bowl, stick in the scone all round, and make it neat and smooth. Then take one pound of steak and one mutton kidney, cut them all in thin slices, and dip them in a little flour mixed with one teaspoonful of salt and a little pepper. Fill the dish with this, and fill it up with water to near the top. Wet the edges all round, put on the lid, and fasten it to the wet edges. Cover with a greased paper; put it in a pot with a little water, put a lid closely on the pot, and steam two and half hours. One inch of water is enough.

MISCELLANEOUS.

There are few people who are not at times annoyed by a twitching of the muscles of the eye. This is a danger signal indicating abuse of the organs or extreme fatigue of the whole system, and the remedy is perfect rest. If this fails to restore, an oculist should be consulted.

The old penalty standing against a German soldier or sailor of the standing army or navy who left the fatherland was a fine of two hundred marks, or forty days' imprisonment. That has now been raised to one thousand marks' fine, or imprisonment for four months.

White paper is being used for dozens of purposes formerly monopolised by wood or even a harder material, such as railway carriage wheels, boxes, barrels, tubs, pails, and so forth. wood is rapidly driving other ingredients to the wall in the manufacture of nearly all the cheaper grades of paper.

The latest malady, which has been called embroiderer's cramp, seems to be something after the nature of writers' cramp, and can only be removed by perfect rest and cure. The elaborate altar cloths, stoles, and vestments, the embroidering of which has become quite a craze, are, of course, accountable for it.

It is impossible to stand or breathe aright if the feet are pinched. When correct posture and breathing are interfered with, the circulation is impeded, and deleterious substances in the blood tend to make the complexion bad. This is one of the many evils of tight shoes. To be well shod has a marked influence on carriage. The feet symbolise the body in their way as much as do the hands.

An Imperial decree has been issued in Germany, forbidding the manufacture and sale of machines for producing artificial coffee beans, as contravening the food law. These beans are not intended to supply by themselves a beverage which, from similarity of taste or effect, might form a substitute for coffee, but to be used in trade for mixing with the genuine article.

Lazy men might find happy abiding places on the sixteen thousand islands which dot the sea between the Island of Madagascar and the coast of India. Only about six hundred of them are inhabited. The soil is so fruitful that any man can live and support his family on one of these islands for a whole year at an expense of not more than twenty-five days' labour. Only the scantiest clothes are worn.

It has been claimed that the seeds taken from ancient Egyptian tombs are capable of growth, but proof of the claim is lacking. It has been demonstrated, however, that seeds of a very great age are capable of development. Raspberries have been raised from seed taken from the stomach of a man who died during the time of the Emperor Hadrian, who reigned in the second century of our era. Think of it, a seed springing into new life after lying dormant sixteen centuries!

"Volapuk," of which nothing has been heard for some three or four years, has just come into notice again. Not that its students have increased in number, or that it has been found to answer all the requirements of a universal language; on the contrary, it is its inadequacy that has brought it to remembrance again, so to speak, for its comparative failure as a common tongue has induced an ingenious philogist to invent another "universal-language," which, if one may be permitted a Hibernianism, is to be used chiefly for correspondence. It is to consist of numbers, which will be the same in all languages for certain words. A dictionary will be compiled and by its aid it is maintained that a numerical letter can thus be read by a Chinese, Frenchman, Pole or Portuguese without any study.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

M. A. Glover.—We do not undertake to solve proportion sums.

Folly.—If there are children the widow takes one-third of the property and the children the rest.

Laddie.—He must be for three years at least in a shop where "engines are made and repaired."

Constant Reader.—Report the case to the police. The party who got the watch is guilty of fraud.

Bullins.—The three latest general elections took place in April, 1880, in December, 1885, and in July, 1886.

Bridesmaid.—Banns are not published when notices are posted at the registrars' office.

Ignorant.—The name St. John is usually pronounced as if spelled "Sinjin."

Bo-Peep.—The *London* foundered in the Bay of Biscay on 11th January, 1865.

Mollie.—Female warders are in attendance on female prisoners awaiting trial.

Chris.—The Malayan forests, from whence comes gutta-percha, are rapidly being demolished.

An Admirer.—Madame Adelina Patti was born at Madrid, 9th April, 1843.

Dudley.—Dudley town is in Worcestershire. Dudley Castle is in Staffordshire.

F. T.—Drill-instructors who reside outside of barracks can vote, but not men in barracks.

Distraction.—The patient is not liable for damage done by his child eight years old.

Rajah.—Our wars with the Sikhs of the Punjaub began in 1845 and ended in 1849.

J. J.—A lodger's goods of any kind may be detained for non-payment of rent.

Constant Inquirer.—The City of London is supposed to be the most populous city in the world.

Citizen.—Birmingham is a city by Royal Charter. It has not got either a bishop or cathedral.

A. B. C.—Imperial Federation League, 30, Charles-street, Berkeley-square, London, W.

Geof.—It is not absolutely necessary to use a wedding-ring to complete a legal marriage ceremony.

A Bride.—Wedding presents are the separate property of the wife, and may be treated as such.

G. Cordie.—The Deceased Wife's Sister Bill has several times passed the Commons but been rejected by the Lords.

Sufferer.—If troubled with headache, try the simultaneous application of hot water to the feet and back of the neck.

Sorely Tried.—"Breaking a child's will" is an utterly wrong proceeding. What ought to be done is to direct, strengthen, and develop it wisely.

Darby and Joan.—Married couples over sixty years of age are permitted to live together in workhouses, if they wish to do so.

Tom's Darling.—The Second Battalion Scottish Rifles are at Lucknow, Bengal. They are not under orders for home or elsewhere yet, as far as we can ascertain.

X. Y. Z.—If the wife leaves her home and refuses to return, her husband is not responsible for her maintenance.

Anxious Inquirer.—No word as yet of the return of the Scottish Rifles from Bengal. Should not expect it this year.

Sir Philip.—An apprentice can only claim the pay ruling in the ship—that is, the rates the crew signed for.

Wanderer.—The duty on watches sent into Canada is 25 per cent. *ad valorem*—that is, if the watch is worth £4, duty 20s.

Little Mother.—A child of thirteen who has passed the fourth standard can leave school, and can work full time.

Joby.—*Whitaker's Almanack* a reliable publication, declares that wild duck are protected under the game laws.

Constance Carew.—We do not give addresses. Look in the London Directory. It can now be seen at any free library.

Jack's Darling.—The *Dreadnought* is in the Mediterranean commission at present as is not known when she will return.

Landlord.—Yes, if there is no agreement to the contrary; but the tenant remains liable for rent and damages to property.

W. D.—Whether at land or sea, the nationality of the father decides the nationality of the child. In the case you specify the children would be English.

T. L.—We fear you have no remedy but to leave the house. If the two houses are owned by the same landlord, speak to him about it.

Maurice.—The births of the United Kingdom for the three months ended September 29 were 280,657, and the deaths 150,353.

Patriot.—Queen Victoria's first child was a daughter, now the Dowager German Empress (Princess Royal); the Prince of Wales is her second child.

Vegeterian.—The carrot is probably the most nourishing and wholesome of all the commoner vegetables; only hurtful when eaten raw.

L. S. B.—Lord Beaconsfield and Lord Salisbury were the British plenipotentiaries at the Berlin Congress in 1878, after the Russo-Turkish war.

Fashion.—There is no chance of hoops coming in; the tendency is the other way. Skirts are being tightened instead of distended.

Claire.—The line "For men must work and women must weep" is from Charles Kingsley's ballad of "The Three Fishers."

Broken Heart.—An action for breach of promise of marriage cannot be brought against a person under twenty-one years of age.

Grammar.—Endeavour is properly a verb, but there is a loose use of it as a noun which has the sanction of custom.

M. P.—We are sorry not to be able to supply you with the information you require ourselves, but if you write to the Emigration Inquiry Office, Broadway, Westminster, they will answer any questions on the subject.

Irene.—The fee paid is entirely a private affair between her and those who engage her. Of course it varies with circumstances. We can only refer you to the promoters of her concerts.

Cora.—Marriages contracted in France between an Englishman and Frenchwoman are legal in England if legal in France. You must therefore make sure that the legal conditions have been satisfied in France.

THE LITTLE GRAVE.

"It's only a little grave," they said,
"Only just a child that's dead;"
And so they carelessly turned away
From the mound the spade had made that day.
Ah, they did not know how deep a shade
That little grave in our home had made.

I know the coffin was narrow and small,
One yard would have served for an ample pall,
And one man in his arms could have borne away
The rosebud and its freight of clay.
But I know that darling hopes were hid
Beneath that little coffin lid.

I knew that a mother had stood that day
With folded hands by that form of clay;
I knew that burning tears were hid
'Neath the drooping lash and aching lid;
And I knew her lip and cheek and brow
Were almost as white as her baby's now.

I knew that some things were hid away—
The crimson frocks and wrappings gay,
The little sock and half-worn shoe,
The cap with its plumes and tassels blue;
An empty crib with its covers spread,
As white as the face of the sinless dead.

'Tis a little grave, but oh, beware!
For world-wide hopes are buried there;
And ye, perhaps, in coming years,
May see, like her, through blinding tears,
How much of light, how much of joy,
Is buried with an only boy!

Bob.—The seal is covered with hair very much as a young calf is, but in preparing the fur for ladies' wear all the coarse outer hair is removed, and it is the close, soft, under hair that is seen in jackets and paletots.

Swindled.—Margarine cannot be sold except in a paper with the name of the article printed upon it in bold characters. A dealer who fails to do this incurs a fine.

L. N. A.—Bread per quartern loaf was as high as 1s. 10½d. for four weeks in the year 1800; at 1s. 3½d. in 1810; and 1s. 9½d. in 1812. Since 1814 it has not been over 1s., though it was 11½d. in 1846 and again in 1847.

Snowdrop.—If the hirer breaks the agreement by non-payment, certainly the owner can retake possession, as the machine is not yours until you have paid the whole amount. Can you not come to some terms with him?

Wrathful.—If the man never really had any money in the bank, or at least such a sum as would entitle him to issue a cheque against it, then he is guilty of fraud when he does so, and must be dealt with accordingly. State the facts to the police.

Regular Subscriber.—1. The light blue is Cambridge and the dark blue is Oxford. If you mean the colours of the "degree hoods" we must refer you to *Whitaker*. The list would be too long for quotation here. 2. The 4th of August, 1871, was on a Friday.

Queen of Diamonds.—Diamonds perfectly free of colour are said to be of the first water, and are most valued. Those of a slight rose tint are also highly valued, and next to these green-tinted stones are considered the best.

Ignoramus.—It is customary to address a bishop (suffragans included) as "My Lord." In writing or speaking of a bishop the name of the see is commonly used; but it is permissible to speak or write of Bishop So and So, using the prelate's family name.

Disputant.—"Spoon*fuls*," and not "*spoons*'ful," is the word. The "s" is added at the *end* of the word, and is not interpolated in the middle. Ask the young gentleman if he would say "*winds*'all" instead of "wind*falls*," and *waters*'al" instead of "water*falls*."

In a Pickle.—Impossible to say. These loans are always a matter of private arrangement, and their terms depend upon the special circumstances of each case. It is a dear way of getting money, always, and in fact is so disadvantageous that we should not think of recommending it to anyone.

B. R.—If notice is given on the 24th of the month it expires on the 24th of the month following. Before leaving, the girl may be required to complete the ordinary day's work, though she should be free to return home or reach her future situation in reasonable time.

Tattler.—Remember Carlyle's declaration, "Speech is silvern, but silence is golden;" and Burn's more laconic "Aye keep something to yoursel' you wouldna gie to ony." There is no greater fault in business dealings of all kinds than that of being over-communicative.

Perrot.—The Royal Palace of Saint Cloud was almost entirely burned during the siege of Paris in 1870, but many works of art were saved. It is on the left bank of the Seine, about two miles west of Paris. It received its name from a monastery built by Clodoald, a grandson of Clovis.

A Young Couple.—The notice required for leaving a house should always be a matter of written agreement. You took the house at a "yearly rent," to be paid monthly, but it is impossible for us to say what was the mutual understanding as to notice. You must come to some arrangement.

In Need of Advice.—Purchasers of stamps are in all cases found by accident. There is no recognised market for such wares. London dealers exist rather to find markets for themselves than to provide one for sellers, and cannot be dealt with profitably. Advertise your collection, and see what comes by that.

Perplexity.—A pawnbroker is bound to deliver the pledge to any person who produces the ticket and claims to redeem the same; but as to transmission of the pledge through the post that must be a matter of arrangement. You had better write to the pawnbroker and explain what you want done.

Deux Jeunes Filles.—1. A gentleman so thoroughly cognisant of the laws of etiquette should know that he can only become acquainted with the ladies through an acquaintance of theirs. Why not try and get an introduction through one of the "boys"? 2. We never attempt character-reading by the handwriting. In this instance it would not be very difficult.

Highland Lad.—The 92nd Highlanders were raised by the Marquis of Huntley in 1794, the regiment being embodied on 24th June of that year. The beautiful Duchess of Gordon recruited in person for the regiment on horseback at markets, wearing a regimental jacket and bonnet, and offering a kiss and a guinea as bounty to all who joined.

C. Y.—The best thing you can do now is to write to the postmaster at the address you quote, requesting him to say whether the letter forwarded by you to that address has been delivered. If so, you are right; if not, it will be returned, and you can then write to the next destination of the vessel, where your friend is likely to arrive probably at the end of January.

Claude.—The Atlantic telegraph cables are laid on what is known as the "Telegraph Plateau," a ridge about four hundred miles wide and from two to two-and-a-half miles below the surface of the ocean, and extending along the bottom of the Atlantic from Cape Clear in Ireland to Cape Race in Newfoundland, a distance of 1,640 miles.

Mignon.—1. Try and think a little less about yourself, and more about those around you, and we think you will find the "annoying habit" disappear. There is nothing like self-consciousness to make a person blush. 2. We can only recommend keeping your feet warm and dry. Chilblains are very often constitutional. 3. Rub your hands well with glycerine before going to bed, and sleep in gloves. We are very glad you like the "Reader" so much.

Lenny.—A pet squirrel should be kept in a cage at least four feet high and six feet long, or large enough for a good-sized boy to get into, fitted with perches like the branches of trees, and a neat little box into which it can creep to have a quiet sleep. Care should be taken to have this clean, and the food box and water dish, which should be of glass, should be kept clean also. Squirrels should be fed on nuts, such as walnuts, hickory nuts, filberts, almonds, and beech nuts. They also like milk, and will eat bread and milk with pleasure. Adopt these suggestions, and your pets will, perhaps, get over the troubles referred to.

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